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SHAKEN CREEDS:

THE VIRGIN BIRTH DOCTRINE

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THE VIRGIN BIRTH DOCTRINE

A STUDY OF ITS ORIGIN

BY

JOCELYN RHYS

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INTRODUCTION

Most men and nearly all women accept, without any inquiries or any doubts, the conventions and beliefs of those who surround them. They accept them, as they accept their alphabet and their arithmetic, without any curiosity as to their origins, and with a vague feeling that they are the products of nature rather than the work of man. They either do not know that some men disregard those conventions, and that some men deny the truth of those beliefs, or they look upon such disregards and denials as the follies of the ignorant and the wilful perversions of the evil-minded. But there is a minority who ponder on these things, and who believe, like Descartes, that the first principle of philosophy is that, "in order to seek truth, it is necessary once in the course of our life to doubt of all things"—to doubt once, not necessarily in order to disbelieve always, but to discover whether our beliefs are well founded, to strengthen our trust in those which are well founded, and to discard those which are ill founded.

At a time of great convulsions, more than at any other time, men and women are driven to examine their most cherished convictions, and to inquire whether the misfortunes which mankind suffers are not due to men's own erroneous beliefs and false aims. In the last great disaster which has so nearly overwhelmed civilization—the great War which, though nominally ended, still hinders by its aftermath the co-operative progress of

human society, and still inflames national passions—thousands of people, who would probably, had it not taken place, never have questioned the customs, the creeds, and the conventions in which they were brought up, have been aroused from their complacent acquiescence in things as they are. They have begun to examine not only the generally accepted political, social, and fiscal theories, but also the religious doctrines which they have inherited rather than consciously accepted. Sons are inquiring into the reasons for believing doctrines which their fathers would have thought it impious to question. The "man in the street" has begun to learn what the philosopher in his study has known for a long time.

From inquiry into the basis of our beliefs nothing but good can ensue. Those things which are true can always survive exposure to light; only morbid growths succumb to the rays. Most people now realize this, and also realize that peace, progress, and prosperity—civilization itself—depend upon the recognition of facts, and not upon the bolstering up of pretences. Founded upon the truth, or at any rate upon the nearest approach to the truth of which we are capable, civilization can stand and may progress. Founded upon shams and conventions, civilization must fall.

But there still survive a minority who fear that the foundations of society would be endangered by any alteration in its structure, or by the removal of any material known to be decayed. These people do not maintain that the material is sound, but they oppose any proposals for the substitution of sound for rotten material, and, dreading the publicity of repairs, advocate another coat of whitewash to conceal the decay.

Early in this year there was carried on, in the columns of the "Times," a correspondence about "Shaken Creeds." By the uninitiated it might be thought that the questions in dispute were about matters of fact, but by those who have followed the theological controversies of the last few years it is known that the real issue is whether the acknowledged and recognized facts should be openly admitted or still concealed from the public. The facts are no longer disputed by any theologian or layman with a reputation for learning.

The clerical dignitaries who took part in this correspondence themselves write of traditions which are "largely derived from the erroneous speculation of past ages," of "obsolete formulæ," of phrases tolerated only because of their archæological associations, and of formularies which have so far fallen "out of correspondence with general contemporary standards of knowledge and belief as to acquire an air of unreality." Not one of these defenders of the faith, who object to the demand for a re-statement of the Church's creeds, ventures to affirm that her present creeds are in fact true. They all disguise the "real issue in a drapery of pious irrelevancies," recommend "a policy of silence, patience, and thought," and express their doubts whether an adequate re-statement is possible.

To the onlooker the situation appears quite clear. All the educated clergy have ceased to believe in certain doctrines which are contained in the creeds of the Church to which they belong. Some of them, indeed, still succeed in persuading themselves—by giving new meanings to old words—that they believe in some doctrines closely resembling those enshrined in their creeds. Others—more honest or more logical—do not

even pretend to believe, though they too still repeat the creeds of their liturgy.

The situation has become intolerable for those of the clergy whose work lies among educated folk—men and women who, they feel, must suspect their honesty. But the ecclesiastical authorities fear to move. They think of the large numbers of ignorant devotees in their flocks who have not yet felt a breath of the wind which shakes the creeds, and who would be scandalized to hear to-day of any proposals for the alteration of those creeds which yesterday they were bidden to put their trust in.

Several bishops have appealed to the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a commission to discuss the disputed doctrines—a commission which would "achieve its purpose by systematic work extending over a long period"—in fact a period so long that it is suggested that the committee should report "in a year or two" whether they are likely to bring their labours to a successful conclusion. The evil moment would be postponed; the problem perhaps shelved for ever. But what of the poor men who must still repeat words which they do not believe?

Evidently there is but one cure for the troubles which afflict our clergy. Their flocks must be taught what they themselves already know. If they cannot speak, laymen can. Fully-informed congregations will not obstruct the progress of their pastors from archæological positions to modern ones. Those who desire to know what is shaken, and how it is shaken, will be able to form their own opinions.

The present book is intended to serve as an introduction to the study of those problems which such men and women desire to examine. Those who do not wish to

investigate these problems, those who prefer to accept without question and without interest the doctrines in which they were nurtured, are not likely to read it, and have no right to complain of its being written for those others who are more interested in their religion. There is an old cry—an ancient cant or chant repeated not only by a choir who never analyse the meaning of the words they use, but by some people for whose opinion one must have every respect—that it is better not to "disturb" the minds of those who find in their religion satisfaction for all their spiritual requirements. That argument was used by some of the Romans who opposed the introduction of Christianity, and by every priest and every politician who has been more concerned with the maintenance of his own position than with the attainment of truth. It can apply with any force only to those persons who live in intellectual backwaters, who read only the lightest of light literature, and who pass their days like the ruminants, concerned only with the satisfaction of their appetites. Such persons will, either for good or evil, remain undisturbed by the issue of yet another book, as they are no more likely to read it than the previously published works dealing with similar topics. Their placid intellectual slumbers will not be disturbed. They are under no compulsion to read or to wonder.

But the minds of thinking men are already "disturbed," and can be quieted only by a frank discussion of the matters which disturb them. If men believe that there exists a conspiracy of silence formed to hoodwink them, mental disturbance violently externalizes itself. Men who think that their rulers and teachers have combined to humbug them become filled with blind fury. A great deal of the most violent revolutionary writing and talk

which goes on to-day, in various inconspicuous and as yet not very numerous corners of our great cities, is founded upon, and attempts to justify itself by, this alleged conspiracy to humbug. Silence and pretence have, in the words of Canon Barnes, "encouraged the prevalent belief that religious people have a low standard of truth."[1] The real problem is not to disturb the minds of the taught, but to enable the teachers to acknowledge, without entire loss of authority and influence, the errors made in the past by themselves and their predecessors. Before that problem can be satisfactorily tackled, it is necessary to inquire what those errors are, how they came to be accepted in the past, how they survived until the present, and what elements of truth may be mixed up with the false theories that have come down to us from a past when men were, not indeed more foolish than we are, but more ignorant about the processes of nature.

By the majority of our parsons the problem is ignored, and silence is kept about those matters which will be discussed in this book. The more enthusiastic and the better educated of the clergy, however, have at last realized that the problem must be faced and discussed. They know, and they acknowledge, that the sceptic is not always, as is so often alleged, a mere destroyer; and that his aim generally is "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made; that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."[2] "The things that have been shaken—shaken so severely that they have been shaken out of the hearts and minds of modern

[1] Address to the Association of University Women Teachers on "The Problem of Religious Education," January 5, 1922. ("Times" report, January 6, 1922.)

[2] Hebrews xii, 27.

educated Englishmen—still remain in our Church's formularies, in our Prayer Book, in our hymn-books, and also, owing to their training, in the minds of many of our clergy."[1] "Those who do not know these things are shaken, and who can in consequence live in a fool's paradise or paddle little boats in ecclesiastical backwaters," are now few in number; but it is they who, backed by the force of conservative inertia which is at once the strength and the weakness of the English character, strive to allow "the English Church to become so burdened with the impedimenta of the past that she must become an ineffective obscurantist sect," regarded by the general public as a "narcotic for the doping of humanity, or an invention of self-seeking priests."[2]

In a recent work of Christian apologetics this necessity for bringing Christian doctrine more into line with modern knowledge, and for approximating nominal creeds to actual beliefs, is stated as follows:—

> "The modern world is asking questions. Christianity and its traditional theology have come down to us from an age very different from our own—an age when the sun and the stars moved round the earth, when the meaning of natural law and evolution was only dimly apprehended, when the psychology of religion, the historical method, and the critical study of ancient documents were yet unborn. These things touch the foundations of the old beliefs, and it is about the foundations that the world is asking.
>
> "The world is calling for religion, but it cannot accept a religion if its theology is out of harmony with science, philosophy, and scholarship."
>
> "Those who believe.....should set themselves to a careful re-examination, and, if need be, re-statement, of the

[1] Rev. H. D. A. Major, Assize Sermon at Oxford, January 15, 1922.
[2] See before-mentioned sermon, from which the quotations are made.

foundations of their belief in the light of the knowledge and thought of the day."[1]

"The men whose position in the Church is such that they cannot speak at all except with authority 'cannot risk such experiments.'[2]

"The average man and church-goer have still to realize the situation. They are bound to suffer in a measure the convulsions already undergone by a minority."[3]

"What, then, is the position of the Christian preacher? .....His hold on a supernatural Gospel may be weak."[4]

"Doubtless, despite all that has been claimed for this generation, the mass of men in this country—certainly the majority of church-goers—have still to realize it" (i.e., the conclusions which inevitably follow the consideration of facts unknown to most men a generation ago; unknown to all men, though suspected by a few, a century ago).[5]

The authors of the book (or rather series of essays) from which the above quotations are taken are all, with the exception of one, ordained clergymen; the seventh being a layman and a fellow and lecturer in Philosophy of Lincoln College. Their evidence for the necessity of re-statement—evidence which is repeated, without much result, by a large number of other scholarly ecclesiastics—should convince even those unacquainted with the facts of the case that there is good reason for taking stock of our professed religious beliefs.

Though, from their position perhaps naturally, these seven authors hesitate to follow their own arguments to their logical conclusions, though they evade many of the principal issues,[6] and though their arguments, like those

[1] "Foundations." A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought. By Seven Oxford Men. Introduction, p. vii. (Macmillan; 1913.)
[2] Id, p. x.
[3] Id. Synopsis of first chapter.
[4] Id.
[5] Id, chapter i, p. 10.
[6] When the re-statement of a doctrine seems to be about to appear, the issue is slurred over, and a cloud of rhetoric—page upon page of it—

of most theologians, often seem directed to proving, not that their doctrines must be true, but that it is just possible that there may be some element of undemonstable truth hidden in them, this very recognition of the problem they deal with justifies, even if other justifications were lacking, the publication of an account, intended for beginners in such studies, of the origin of one of the doctrines that have been assailed.

There are some past whom the flood of modern thought sweeps unnoticed—men and women who continue to chatter among themselves about the correct cut and colour of a clergyman's vestments, or about whether the curate turns to the East or to the West, or about "High" and "Low." Such people are oblivious of the really fundamental questions which the Church is being asked, and for such I do not write, as they seldom read anything but the lightest of literature, and are unlikely to embark upon a study which must appear to them so arduous, so unnecessary, and so uninteresting.

I write for those who are non-plussed by the scepticism which cultured men and women in general, and many distinguished writers in particular, display regarding their ancient creeds, and who wish to study more closely the reasons for that scepticism; for those who have heard echoes of the controversies, and who wonder what it exactly is that is doubted, and why it is doubted; and for those who wonder why so many earnest, worthy, and learned citizens have ceased to take part in the religious observances of their national Church.

To deal adequately with all the questions at issue would require several volumes. I have selected for treat-

obscures the point which should have been made to stand out clearly and decided one way or the other.

ment but one—namely, the doctrine that Jesus was born of a virgin and begotten by the Holy Ghost.

To understand how and when that doctrine arose it is necessary to have some acquaintance with the facts that are known about the authorship of the New Testament books, and (I think) some acquaintance with the doctrines of those early Christians who were known as Gnostics. I have therefore in Part I dealt briefly with those two subjects. Those to whom these subjects seem uninteresting are recommended to skip Part I, and to begin with Part II; but the questions at issue cannot be fully comprehended without some acquaintance with the subjects discussed in the first part of the book.

The facts which I have collected together have been for some time well known to all students of theology; the conclusions at which I have arrived are the same as those which most modern inquirers have reached.

It is useless to blink at facts because at first sight they do not seem to be pleasant ones. It is better to face them boldly, and, when we learn that what we have hitherto relied on was not the truth, to seek new hopes and a new faith founded upon solid realities.

The mere fact of holding a false belief is not necessarily harmful. Firm believers in the most foolish of superstitions have often lived noble lives, and sometimes led the march of progress in departments other than that of their misbelief. What is harmful is that men should pretend to believe things which they really do not believe, and that men in prominent positions should be suspected of pretending to believe things which they do not really believe.

As Carlyle pointed out in his lecture on "The Hero as Priest," "the fatal circumstance of Idolatry" was not

that the idols were false, but that eventually men continued to worship them after they had begun to realize that they were false. Worship became a pretence. "Souls are no longer *filled* with their Fetish, but only pretend to be filled, and would fain make themselves feel that they are filled.....No more immoral act can be done by human creature.....Men are no longer *sincere* men. I do not wonder that the earnest man denounces this, brands it, prosecutes it with inextinguishable aversion."

"You do not believe," said Coleridge; "you only believe you believe." So even if the creeds of the Church are suitable, as one of their apologists in the above-mentioned "Times" correspondence declares, "for those simple souls who take things for granted," yet their retention cannot be justified if they are untrue in the eyes of those who do not take everything for granted. The number of the extremely simple becomes daily smaller: to cater only for the simple results in diminishing congregations, and will eventually result in no congregations at all—a prospect which should be viewed with alarm by those who consider that the Church has an ethical function to perform in a community inclined to worship material success as the greatest, if not indeed the only true, God.

J. R.

I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Thomas Whittaker, who has kindly read the proofs of this book. For any errors that still remain I alone am responsible. For freedom from error, in so far as that unattainable ideal has been approached, my thanks are due to him.

September 1, 1922.

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Synopsis: The Virgin Mary substituted for the pagan goddesses. Inherits the festivals and worship of the "mother of the gods." Rise of Mariolatry. The glorification of virginity. A re-action of pagan philosophers as well as of Christian theologians against sexual excesses. Reaction goes to absurd lengths. Original sin. Further development of the Virgin Birth doctrine. Mary's own immaculate birth. New doctrine accepted by Catholic Church. Mary's perpetual virginity. Buddhist parallel. Joseph's perpetual celibacy. The fate of a mildly sceptical monk. Legends about Mary's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Disputes about the Incarnation. How the doctrine was made obligatory, and enforced for hundreds of years. The Virgin Birth story rejected by many early Christians as well as by Jews and pagans. The accusations of Celsus. The story about Jesus ben Pandira. The evidence of the Fathers of the Church that the Virgin Birth story was disbelieved by many Christians. Paul of Samosata. Heresies suppressed by the Catholic Church when it became the State religion of the

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Roman Empire. Doubts effectually silenced by the Inquisition and other methods. The Unitarians. Servetus burnt to death in 1553. Unitarians burnt to death in England. Persecution continues until the nineteenth century. Orthodoxy the only path to honours and rewards. Scepticism visited by heavy penalties. Expressions of doubt forbidden. Milman's "History of Christianity." Blasphemy Laws still on the Statute Book, but during the last thirty years seldom enforced. As soon as it became possible for laymen to study the origin of the Virgin Birth doctrine, scepticism became widespread. Now very few even of the clergy believe it. The clergy, however, fear to speak openly, lest the whole ecclesiastical fabric fall about their ears. They either remain silent or they speak in metaphors. Occasionally bishops, deans, and other clergymen essay a more candid confession, but they still hesitate to repudiate the doctrine openly and honestly. Examples given of the casuistry employed to veil the repudiation of the Creeds. The Virgin Birth not mentioned, but in lieu thereof meaningless phrases about divinity and humanity. Is it honest to repeat the Creeds when the doctrine is disbelieved? It would be difficult to-day to find more than one student of the question who really believes that Jesus was born of a virgin.

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PART I

THE BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Chapter I

PREFATORY

Fully to understand the doctrines of our own religion or of any other religion, we ought to have a thorough knowledge[1] of the circumstances in which it arose, and of the history of its subsequent development. This knowledge would include an understanding of the previous religious beliefs of the people among whom the religion originated, of the mental habits of those people, of their customs and laws, and of their hopes and fears.[2] It would include an acquaintance with the doctrines believed in by the neighbouring peoples, and it more particularly would embrace a knowledge of the exact doctrines accepted by the very earliest adherents of the new religion, and of how these doctrines became altered, if they were altered, in subsequent times. In the case of Christianity and of most of the great religions of the world, the available knowledge concerning these matters is, as a matter of fact, extremely limited; but so far as it goes we should, if we aspire to understand what we profess to believe, attempt to acquire it.

Those who have never had the inclination, or who have never found the time, to examine the foundations of their beliefs are generally under the impression that they already possess a considerable amount of such

[1] We are not at present concerned with philosophical questions about the relativity of all knowledge. The word "knowledge" is used in its ordinary every-day sense.

[2] In other words, a view of what has been called the "psychological climate" in which the religion was formed. As we continue our study we shall, in an endeavour to realize what men of the day really meant when they used certain expressions, frequently consider various aspects of this climate.

knowledge. Such people, if they read the above remarks, may probably say to themselves: "We know that certain events took place at a certain time in the world's history, that those events are truthfully recorded in certain inspired books which we read, and that upon the contents of those books our present beliefs are founded." This, or something closely resembling it, is the belief of millions of adherents of different religions and of different sects. But, as their various creeds differ considerably, the beliefs of some of them must be founded upon error—error either concerning the events which they believe to have taken place, and in the books which they believe record those events, or error in the deductions made from the contents of those books.[1]

How can we satisfy ourselves that our own beliefs are the ones which are well founded, and how can we convince others that theirs are ill founded? It is evidently useless merely to assert that our knowledge is correct, and that theirs is incorrect. We must give some good reasons to convince them that such is the case. We must call further evidence, and we must allow them to question our witnesses.

The only further evidence we can call is the evidence of contemporary or nearly contemporary historians other than the writers of the books; and the principal questions that they will ask of our former witnesses, which are the said books, are about the names of the writers, the date of the writing, and the agreement between the different books themselves.

This, then, is what we must do if we wish to satisfy ourselves as to the truth of the beliefs we hold. Even if we do not attempt to acquire all the knowledge detailed above as necessary for a complete understanding of our

[1] As the errors in deduction would relate chiefly to mere sectarian differences and not to the more important differences which exist between the adherents of altogether different religions, we shall for the present confine our attention to the books and the events.

religion, we must at least acquire some knowledge of the authorship of the books which record the events we believe in, of the dates when those books first made their appearance, of any alterations or additions made in or to them, of the acceptance or rejection of these and of any other scriptures by the earliest adherents of our religion,[1] and of what some other writers of repute other than these authors had to say about the events therein recorded.

Before, therefore, we start upon any examination of the events upon which the doctrines of Christianity are said to be founded, we must consider the authorship and dates of the books of the New Testament. We shall do so as briefly as the complexity and the importance of the subject permit, fully realizing that to many such an investigation makes no appeal, but also realizing that without some knowledge of the origin of the New Testament an appreciation of the true facts of Christianity is impossible. We shall have to consider various other contemporary or nearly contemporary writings which throw light upon both the publication of our present New Testament books and the doctrines held by Christians in the earliest days of which we have any record.

The earliest historical records of Christianity are supposed to have been written in the middle of the first century A.D., and were addressed to Churches composed of small groups of men meeting at each other's houses for religious purposes. Should we desire to elucidate the origin of Christianity, it is most important to discover exactly what the creed of these Christians then was.[2]

The task is hard, since not only are the records few, but they have come down to us through the hands of many copyists, who have not hesitated to edit the manuscripts

[1] This, of course, includes knowledge of when, and by whom, they were first said to be "inspired."

[2] That it was not exactly the same as the subsequent belief will become apparent as we proceed.

to suit the constantly varying orthodoxy of each age in which they worked.

It must be remembered that even the earliest of the manuscripts[1] which have come down to us cannot lay claim to being the original writings, but are the result of repeated copyings. Texts which were liable—as before the invention of printing all texts were liable—to accidental corruption in the process of copying must constantly have been undergoing alteration; and additions and marginal notes made by individuals for their own use, for the edification of others, and for the elucidation of difficulties, were gradually incorporated into the text, even when deliberate falsification in the supposed interests of orthodoxy was not intended. That the latter was not infrequent is proved by many facts which will come to light as we continue our study of the books.[2]

As we shall see later, the early Christian Fathers[3] themselves placed but little reliance upon the genuineness

[1] The earliest manuscripts of any New Testament books possessed by the British Museum date from the fifth century, and there are but two earlier codices in existence—one incomplete. The oldest existing manuscripts of the Gospels are fourth-century, and have some important variations from the texts used in compiling our Authorized Version of the Bible.

[2] The most notorious example is the verse 1 John v, 7, introduced in only two very late Greek manuscripts of the Epistle, and admittedly a fraudulent interpolation in the interest of one party to the Trinitarian controversy.

[3] The "Christian Fathers," or "Fathers of the Church," are those leading men in the early Christian communities whose writings have been preserved by the Catholic Church and regarded by all orthodox Christians as authoritative in questions of doctrine. As it will be necessary constantly to refer to their evidence, the approximate dates of the earliest of them should be remembered. Included in the list given below are two names of voluminous Christian writers who were eventually, or always, regarded, by what became the Catholic party, as heretics, and also the name of the most celebrated Jewish historian:—

Clement of Rome, 50 (?)-95 A.D.
Justin Martyr, 103-166 A.D.
Irenæus, 147-202 A.D.
Tertullian, 150-220 A.D.
Clement of Alexandria, 155-211 A.D.
Origen, 185-253 A.D.
Marcion (the "heretic"), 100 (?)-165 A.D.
Valentinus (the "Gnostic"), 138-160 A.D.
Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote at the end of the first century A.D.
Papias, first half second century, is known only from being quoted as authority for his statements by Eusebius, who wrote at the beginning of the fourth century.

and accuracy of the manuscripts in their possession; while critics of every shade of opinion are agreed that many of the early Christian documents are, or contain, the deliberate forgeries of zealous monks who saw no harm in thus attempting to strengthen the cause they had at heart.

Fortunately for historical truth, older documents have frequently come to light which enable us to detect the alterations and additions which these scribes made. Furthermore, the documents themselves often contain internal evidence—such as references to later events—of being written by men who lived much later than the reputed authors; and thus we are enabled in some measure to check their authenticity.

Our principal sources of information about primitive Christianity are the writings of, or attributed to, St. Paul; the writings of the Fathers of the Church; and the contemporary Gnostic literature.

Long before any Gospels had been published, and therefore before any writings purporting to give the biography of Jesus were known, most of the Epistles which are included in our New Testament were current in the Christian Churches; not, perhaps, in the exact form in which they have now come down to us, but approximately in that form.

The earliest description of Christianity in our Bible is to be found in the Epistles, and not in the Gospels, although the latter are placed first in the New Testament. That most of these Epistles—in fact, all those which are the genuine work of Paul—were written long before the Gospels were written is admitted by commentators of every shade of orthodoxy.[1] It is, therefore, with the

[1] Endeavour has been made—it is hoped successfully—never to state as a fact any matter which is still controversial, but only to assume as proven those results of the Higher Criticism which are accepted by all commentators of every shade of opinion. Where critics disagree it will be plainly indicated that the statements made are matters of opinion, and not of positive fact. ("Higher Criticism" is a technical expression referring to

Epistles that we must begin our study of Christian origins.

It is, perhaps naturally, with the Gospels that the religious education of most, or all, Christians begins, and consequently the ideas which are generally formed about the origin and early progress of Christianity are necessarily erroneous. If we wish to discover how the Christian doctrines were first unfolded to most of the earliest Christians, we must realize that these were acquainted with the Christianity of the Epistles, and had never heard the Gospel story as it appears in our Canonical Gospels.

To the Epistles, therefore, we will now turn our attention; but before doing so it may be useful to point out a few of the methods by which the approximate date of the writing of an ancient book may be determined; otherwise to the uninitiated the attribution of dates may appear entirely arbitrary.

These methods may roughly be divided into two classes—the examination of the external evidence and the examination of the internal evidence. The former is the evidence, as to a book, obtained from references to it in other books, or from traces of its influence upon other authors. The latter is the evidence, as to a book, obtained from passages in its own text—e.g., from references to events whose dates are known.

It will be noticed that the latest date at which a book can have been written is prior to the first external evidence regarding it, and that the earliest date at which a book can have been written is subsequent to any events to which it may refer. For example, if any book were

inquiries about the authorship, dates, and origins of books, as distinguished from the "Textual Criticism," which is concerned with the comparison of various versions of the same text, of varying accounts of the same episode, and so on. The word "criticism," especially in conjunction with the word "higher," is apt to excite prejudice as implying fault-finding, and boasting superiority. But criticism really includes appreciation as well as discrimination, and nothing can be fully valued unless it be subjected to some measure of criticism.)

referred to by Clement of Rome, that book must have been written before 95 A.D., when Clement of Rome died; and if that same book referred to the siege of Jerusalem, it must have been written after 70 A.D., when Jerusalem was captured. The book in such a case must have been written between 70 and 95. Care, however, has to be taken to ensure that we are not mistaken as to external evidence. An apparent reference to—even an apparent quotation from—a book may really be connected with some unknown work whence the author of the book under consideration obtained some of his facts. And we also, for much the same reason, have to be careful in drawing conclusions from internal evidence, as an apparent reference to a certain event may, unless it is quite clear, really refer to some similar but different event.

There are, of course, many other indications to be found from an examination of internal evidence. The vocabulary, the phraseology, and even the grammar used in a book, unfold their tale to a scholar familiar with the literature of the day;[1] and at times the approximate date is betrayed by references to a highly developed ecclesiastical organization such as did not exist until long after the traditional date of the supposed author's death.

Innumerable points of this kind and of other kinds have been debated for many years by those competent to judge such ancient literature, and a very large measure

[1] Even those of us who are not scholars could immediately distinguish a piece of eighteenth-century English prose from a piece written in the present twentieth century, and with a little practice could accurately distinguish the style of two contemporary authors of a past century. If, too, in a certain book we find constant references to the "Tories" and no mention made of "Unionists" except in one chapter, and in that chapter the same people are always referred to as "Unionists" and never as "Tories," we are justified in suspecting that the chapter in question was written by a different hand from that which wrote the remainder of the book, and very probably at a much later date. If a number of similar inferences could be drawn from other differences of vocabulary and style (for example, the many chapters being written in well-turned phrases, formed of carefully chosen words, and the one chapter being full of colloquialisms and slipshod in style), we might with certainty conclude that the one chapter was interpolated by some editor or other.

of agreement has been arrived at upon certain questions of authorship and date. For those who are not qualified, or have not the inclination, to examine the arguments at length, there are now several primers in which the results and a few of the principal arguments can be found. Two of the most suitable for beginners are "The Bible and Criticism," by W. H. Bennett, D.D., and Walter F. Adeney, D.D. (The People's Books), and "The Making of the New Testament," by Benjamin W. Bacon, D.D. (Home University Library). The orthodox doctors of divinity who are the authors of these two little books naturally take a more conservative point of view than the more "advanced" school of critics; but they frankly acknowledge the force and the value of the arguments by which the old traditional views have been assailed:—

> The findings of the Higher Criticism are startling to those who hear them for the first time, however carefully and impartially they may be stated. These findings have been familiar to scholars for more than half a century; but, in spite of the growth of education, probably a majority are still allowed to grow up under the impression that the traditional views of the Old Testament are the only possible views, the only views consistent with loyalty to Christianity; and that these views are only challenged by the enemies of the faith.....
>
> It would often help the student of the Bible if he would consider that, though these changes seem to him a sudden overwhelming revolution, because they burst upon him all at once, yet in reality they have accumulated gradually; they are the result of a long process; they are due to the patient and devout study of generations of Christian scholars, and have long proved themselves helpful and inspiring to multitudes of Christian ministers and other devout believers.[1]

To question the authorship of these New Testament books is not to attack them as an enemy, but to seek for the truth about them as a friend. The real enemy of religion is he who is indifferent as to whether the

[1] "The Bible and Criticism," pp. 12-13.

Scriptures are true or untrue; it is not he who troubles to inquire and to question.

We must now turn to the books themselves, and see what light they throw upon the beliefs held by the most primitive Christians.

Chapter II

THE EPISTLES

In our New Testament there are twenty-one Epistles, fourteen of which are attributed to St. Paul. One of these fourteen—namely, the Epistle to the Hebrews—is undoubtedly not a Pauline writing,[1] and all the others have at various times been rejected by critics as spurious. Some learned commentators place all the Epistles among second-century writings,[2] and if that view be correct it would dispose altogether of the Pauline authorship; but here we accept the more conservative view of the disputed dates and authorship.

It is generally conceded that Romans, both Corinthians, and Galatians are the genuine work of St. Paul;[3] and many critics believe that certainly the first, and probably the second, Epistle to the Thessalonians are also his work.

With regard to the Epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, opinions are very much divided. All are regarded as, in different degrees, doubtful. The remainder of the Epistles attributed to Paul are generally rejected as spurious, and believed to have been written long after Paul must have been dead.[4]

[1] It was for a long time rejected as spurious by the Catholic Church itself. Its genuineness is defended by no modern commentator.

[2] Though even these place them earlier than the Gospels.

[3] It will be admitted by most readers that these four Epistles contain some of the most beautiful literary work to be found in the New Testament, or indeed in any other collection of books. The genuine Pauline Epistles would date from the middle or shortly after the middle of the first century A.D.; the spurious ones—on a conservative view—certainly after 70 A.D., and possibly not until the middle of the first half of the second century.

[4] The above summary of modern opinion about the Pauline Epistles follows very closely Bennett and Adeney's "The Bible and Criticism" (p. 58); but those authors place 1 and 2 Thessalonians among the undoubtedly genuine Epistles of Paul—indeed, as the first to be written by

As to the Epistles which are not rejected as spurious, it is admitted by all, even by the most orthodox of commentators, that they have been in places interpolated by copyists since they were originally written; but on this matter, again, opinions differ considerably as to the degree of interpolation, the most orthodox declining to label as an interpolation any passage which is not beyond all possibility of cavil proved to be such, and the most unorthodox being inclined to reject as an interpolation every passage whose retention militates against the theories they have formed as to the doctrines taught by the original Paul himself.

The origin of the seven Epistles which are not attributed to Paul is very doubtful, and most commentators—if not all—class every one of them as spurious so far as the pretended authorship is concerned.[1]

It was a custom in those days for authors to adopt a conventional pseudonym for the writings they desired to publish. To give these writings authority among the Churches it was necessary to present them as containing

him. (See Whittaker's "The Origins of Christianity," pp. 43–44, for argument that both Thessalonians are of very late date.) The Rev. A. C. McGiffert, D.D., in the "Encyclopædia Biblica," article "Thessalonians (Epistles to)," summarizes the arguments of the principal schools of commentators, and appears to think that 1 Thessalonians is genuine and 2 Thessalonians very doubtful. Bennett and Adeney also place Philemon with Ephesians and Colossians; but see Van Manen (Professor of Old-Christian Literature and New Testament Exegesis at Leyden University) in "Encyclopædia Biblica," article "Philemon." These questions are not of very great importance in our present inquiry, as it is only necessary for the reader to have a general idea of the order in which the doctrines taught respectively in the Epistles and Gospels appeared.

[1] Perhaps a few writers still accept the first of the Epistles attributed to Peter as the genuine work of that apostle. The second Epistle, and indeed all the other Epistles of this group, were questioned even by the Fathers of the Church, and have been regarded as doubtful at all times when any criticism was indulged in. In the heyday of Catholicism no questions were asked. Until the renaissance of learning had taught men the elements of criticism and enabled them to detect the most flagrant of anachronisms and the most obvious of differences in style, Epistles alleged to have been written by St. Paul and other apostles to celebrated Romans —contemporary and otherwise—existed in considerable numbers, and were accepted by pious Christians as the genuine works of the first preachers of their faith. There were even Epistles in circulation said to have been written by Jesus.

not only the teaching but the very words of some apostle, and a preface bearing the name of that apostle was affixed to them. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to....," "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to....," and similar titular prefaces and addresses, are all very doubtful in origin, and have been, from the very earliest times, criticized as being the additions of later copyists, or conventional pretences of the real authors.

Pseudigraphic authorship was not in those days considered reprehensible. Even if the ignorant were deceived by it, the learned doubtless were not. There were books said to be written by Hermes, pamphlets written by That, letters from Isis. Old Testament books, even the one describing his own death, were said to have been written by Moses himself.

However, without going fully into the questions connected with the authorship of these Epistles, we can study them with great benefit in our search for the doctrines of the early Christians, as they are, at any rate, evidence of what their authors believed to be the doctrines of the men whose names they wrote under. Whether they were mostly written between the years 50 and 60 A.D., as was the traditional theory, or after 70 A.D., or even after 100 A.D., does not affect the fact that they were written before any of the Gospels were written, and that therefore they were addressed to and read by people who had never read the Gospel story as we know it, or, so far as we can tell, any Gospel story at all. They are nearly all addressed to Gentiles, and not to Jews, of whom it might be said that they already knew, by tradition, all the facts of the life of Jesus. Yet we find in them little or nothing about the life or sayings of Jesus. They are, it appears, written by men who are ignorant of any of the acts or sayings of Jesus, save for some few episodes connected with the Passion and Resurrection. And in so far as any details

are given of those episodes, or any words quoted, there is often reason to suspect that the passages in question are interpolations by late editors—for example, the passage beginning with verse 23 of 1 Corinthians xi, where Paul is made to claim that he had been given by "the Lord" a description of the Last Supper, though in the account of his vision of Jesus at his conversion—the only occasion upon which he is supposed to have been spoken to by Him—there is no mention of any such description being given. The passage is, moreover, a paraphrase of a description in a work admittedly later than Paul's day, and is introduced into the middle of an exhortation which subsequently continues as if no interruption had occurred.[1] The Old Testament is freely quoted; but, except as just mentioned, the Gospels or the sayings recorded in the Gospels, never.

To enforce arguments as to doctrines and as to ethical teaching, it would be natural for any author of such Epistles to quote, if he knew them, the words of Jesus himself. Yet this is never done. If the author or authors of the Epistles had known of the account given in any of the Gospels of Jesus eating the Passover and commanding His disciples to kill the Paschal Lamb, he or they would assuredly have quoted this episode in their arguments about whether it was lawful to eat meat.[2] And the same argument applies to the question of whether it is right or wrong to drink wine. The Epistle writer might have quoted the example of Jesus at the marriage in Cana of Galilee;[3] or the words of Jesus saying that He

[1] To those who have not carefully studied these documents charges of interpolation must generally appear unwarranted, and the above explanation is therefore given to show some of the many reasons which have caused commentators to reject one such passage. That such interpolations were made, and that many of them can be recognized, is now admitted even by orthodox scholars. The assumption is not gratuitous.

[2] See Romans xiv, in which the question of eating meat or of restricting one's diet to herbs is discussed. Also 1 Corinthians viii, where, as can be seen at the end of the chapter, the dispute is not only about things offered to idols, but about meat-eating in general.

[3] John ii, 1–11.

had come eating and drinking, and was therefore called a "winebibber";[1] or the example of Jesus drinking wine at the Last Supper. Such references to the authority of Jesus would, presumably, have definitely settled the question of the legality or illegality of wine drinking; but Paul, writing "to the Romans," never refers to the practice or to the preaching of Jesus, but "on his own" recommends his readers to abstain from wine;[2] and the author of the first Epistle of Paul to Timothy, again without any reference to the acts or teaching of Jesus, recommends Timothy to drink a little wine only because of his infirmities.[3]

Throughout the Epistles this neglect to quote Jesus is very marked. Neither in support of theological doctrines nor in support of ethical doctrines is Jesus brought forward as authority. If authority is needed, it is an Old Testament writer who is quoted, not the Gospels, and not any extra-gospel saying of the Lord Jesus.

The Epistle attributed to St. James should be of particular importance, as it is said to have been written by the brother of Jesus, and therefore by one who had exceptional opportunities for knowing the truth at first hand. Yet in that Epistle there is not one word about the life of Jesus, and the illustrations are all from Old Testament stories. It purports to be addressed to the Jews dispersed in foreign countries, and yet the name of Jesus is only twice mentioned, no reference whatever being made to His life.[4] Nothing in it is peculiarly Christian, unless we pretend that neighbourly affection, honest dealing, and humility are peculiar to

[1] Matthew xi, 18–19; Luke vii, 33–34.
[2] Romans xiv, 21.
[3] Timothy v, 23.
[4] If we agree with the commentators in rejecting the authorship of James, one of these mentions of the name of Jesus automatically disappears, since it is in the titular heading. The other is believed to have been introduced by a late compiler long after the body of the original work was completed. The force of the above argument is in that case diminished, but the name of Jesus disappears.

Christianity; and no one who has read the Buddhist, or the Taoist, or the Confucian scriptures, or some Greek philosophies, can pretend that. It might be, and perhaps was, written by some one who knew nothing of Gospel Christianity save the name of Jesus, and not even that if the two mentions of his name are interpolations by late redactors. Written to scattered "friendly societies" of Jews who had or who had not accepted some form of Christianity unconnected with the subsequent Gospel story, this would be credible; but would it be likely—is it indeed credible—that "the brother of Jesus," writing to followers of Jesus, should not enforce his arguments and exhortations by quoting His words or by referring to His life?

In the Epistles attributed to St. Paul the doctrines, though in some ways similar in ethical purpose, differ entirely in actual wording from those of the Gospel writers. The spirit—as regards those matters to which we would nowadays refer as Social Reform—may be much the same, but the words used are entirely unlike those used in the Gospels. If St. Paul's teaching was founded upon the life and sayings of Jesus, how is it that he never quotes his Master? Only upon the assumption that he knew of no sayings to quote, and that his Christianity was not based upon the Jesus of the Gospels, can this omission be explained.

These documents, admittedly the earliest Christian writings which have come down to us, would, if they stood alone, leave us in almost total ignorance of the story told in the Gospels. We would know nothing of the miracles, nor of the birth, nor of the sayings of Jesus, though we would read some very few and very brief references to the death and resurrection of Christ. If these were the only Christian documents we possessed, we would have a fairly clear idea of the charity and other ethical ideals which early Christianity taught, but we would have no idea whatever of the life and character of Jesus.

We now read them, after first reading the Gospels, as a development of what we have read in the Gospels; but their original readers could not do this, as the Gospels were not in existence. The orthodox theory is that the Epistles were addressed to men who already knew something of the life of Jesus by report and tradition; but those reports and traditions must, indeed—if there were any—have been very meagre, as even the authors of the letters did not apparently know enough of the Gospel story to be able to refer to it in support of their arguments. They always quoted from the Old Testament, and never any sayings—traditional or evangelical—of Jesus. We know, from the Epistles themselves, that this was the case, and we also learn it from the Acts of the Apostles.[1]

When Paul wishes to convince his hearers that Jesus was Christ, he brings no evidence about that life which is described in the Gospels, but quotations from the Old Testament prophets, which his hearers, as devout Jews,[2] should believe "must needs have been fulfilled." As no other claimant to the Messiahship could be brought forward, his hearers must—if they believe their own scriptures[3]—accept Jesus as Christ.[4] He, Paul, will prove from the Scriptures that His death and resurrection were necessary;[5] but he makes no attempt to demonstrate anything by quoting any acts or words of the Jesus he speaks of, nor any appeal to tradition or history. Is this

[1] Acts xvii, 2, 3, and xviii, 28. There is but one exception to this. In Acts xx, 35, the author of that book relates that Paul quotes a short saying of Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; but in the Epistles themselves we do not find Jesus quoted in support of the arguments used.

[2] Many of the Gentiles by race were Jews by religion. For an account of the spread of Judaism among the Gentiles see Harnack's "Expansion of Christianity," bk. i, chap. 1.

[3] The term "scriptures" applied to the Old Testament; the New Testament was not yet in being; and in any case the New Testament books were not regarded as scripture until long after Paul's time.

[4] The argument, that if a thing had been prophesied it must have occurred, was generally considered conclusive!

[5] Acts xvii, 2-3; xviii, 28.

Jesus of whom he speaks the same as the Jesus of whom the Gospels tell us? The Gospel Jesus seems often explicitly to repudiate those very theological claims which Paul advances on behalf of Christ. Paul refrains from introducing any reference to the Gospel Jesus when he preaches his new ethical doctrines. He seems to know next to nothing of this Jesus whose followers he persecuted so ruthlessly before he himself began to preach a new religion, which included only this about Him—that He was the long-expected Christ, that He had risen from the dead, and, after speaking to himself, had (presumably, since we hear no more about Him) somehow or other disappeared again.[1]

If Paul had ever heard of the events recorded in the Gospels, they had failed to convince him, as he persecuted the followers of Jesus—not yet called Christians—until the day when he had his vision or saw the risen Jesus. If he had never heard of these events, the Jesus of whom he spoke must have been a very shadowy personality in his eyes, or at any rate different from Him who is spoken of in the Gospels which he had never read.

Paul's doctrine is, avowedly, not that taught by Jesus in the flesh, but that revealed to him by the Christ spirit after the death of Jesus. "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."[2] Paul then goes on (verses 13–17) to give an account of his conversion, or of his inspiration, which differs fundamentally from that given in Acts ix, 1–9. He looks upon himself as the originator of this new philosophy, which has for its basis the code of ethics which he designates as his own gospel. He preaches a doctrine about a spiritual being

[1] The appearance to Paul could not have taken place until long after the Ascension described by Luke, and we have no explanation of how He again leaves the world.

[2] Galatians i, 11–12.

known as Christ who had previously inspired the man Jesus, and not a doctrine about a divinely born Jesus who worked miracles.

Paul and the other writers of the Epistles constantly refer to the schisms and heresies which apparently already existed in Christianity. It is evident that even so early as his day there were differences of opinion upon the facts of Christianity. "I hear that divisions exist among you.....there must be also heresies among you."[1]

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him [Paul himself] that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."[2] We do not know who they were, these "false brethren unawares brought in";[3] but we can tell that they taught a less spiritual doctrine. "Oh, foolish Galatians, who did bewitch you?.....Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye perfected in the flesh?"[4] "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with me."[5] Is this other Jesus, of whom Paul here speaks, the Jesus as described by the sect among whom the Gospels subsequently arose? Were the heresies of which Paul speaks the parents of the present orthodoxy?

"After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you.....speaking perverse things?"[6] "Neither

[1] 1 Corinthians, xi, 18–19.
[2] Galatians i, 6–8.
[3] Galatians ii, 4.
[4] Galatians iii, 1–3.
[5] 2 Corinthians xi, 3–4 (see margin for "me" instead of "him").
[6] Acts xx, 29–30; Paul warning the Ephesians.

give heed to fables and endless genealogies.....some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling."[1] "Some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils."[2] ".....false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies....."[3] These and very many other texts of similar purport show that Christianity was, when they were written, already divided up into various sects teaching very different doctrines from each other. Who were these heretics? In this category are we to include the author of 1 Timothy, who might be the person referred to by the writer of 2 Peter as "a false prophet"? Or are we to include the author of 2 Peter, who might, as the teacher of some newly arising primitive gospel story, be the person denounced by the author of 1 Timothy as a "seducing spirit," who taught "fables and endless genealogies"? We cannot tell; and if the orthodox tradition is wrong, and these Epistles were not written by Peter and Paul respectively, these particular texts are not of very great importance in this connection.

But, apart from these, we know that Paul was always engaged in controversy with some other teachers or preachers of Christianity.[4] According to tradition and to orthodox theory, it was Peter with whom the "Apostle to the Heretics," as Paul was often called, quarrelled; and the causes of their quarrel were questions connected with the eating of meat, the preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles or to Jews alone, the necessity for or the unnecessariness of circumcision. That such questions did arise and led to disputes in the Church is undeniable; but were such questions alone sufficient to lead to such heated recriminations as we find in the Epistles? Were

[1] 1 Timothy i, 4-6. Are these genealogies those afterwards given by Matthew and Luke?
[2] 1 Timothy iv, 1.
[3] 2 Peter ii, 1.
[4] Some of the relative texts will be quoted later, when we endeavour to form a hypothesis as to Paul's actual doctrinal position.

there not some more fundamental divergencies of opinion? The more we examine the Epistles in the light of the subsequent Gospels and in the light of other doctrines current in those days, the more are we forced to the conclusion that at the time when the Epistles were written there was arising a new form of Christianity very different from that taught by Paul, and that it was with the teachers of that new form of Christianity that Paul was disputing.

Paul, who was not himself an eye-witness of any of the occurrences related in the Gospels, and who, in fact, makes very little reference to any of them, may have been correct in his interpretation of the facts, or those who had different views from Paul may have been correct. Either the Pauline, or the Gospel, or some other form of Christianity, may have been the oldest; but, since the Gospels were unknown in his day, it is highly probable that that form of Christianity was not the oldest, and that primitive Christianity was either Pauline or some other non-gospel form of Christianity.

The Gospels refer to false prophets who speak "in my name," and so evidently their authors also found it desirable to warn their readers against current "heresies." As to whether the heresies themselves or the gospel orthodoxies were correct, a similar argument applies. In one of the "apocryphal" works the schisms are explained by a story of the devil having, immediately after his unsuccessful temptation of Jesus, sent out "false prophets, false apostles, and false teachers, who should speak in the name of Christ indeed, but should perform the work of the demon."[1] Was Paul one of these "false apostles"—one of these "false teachers"? He himself claims to teach a new religion—a religion which was, as fast as he taught it, being altered and added to by others.

"According to the grace of God which is given unto

[1] Clementine Recognitions, iv, 34.

me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon."[1] Upon his foundation were to be built up by degrees Catholicism and all modern Christianity, in which the superstructure is far more conspicuous than the foundations. Yet it seems that the sect with which Paul always disputed was just that very sect which contained the germ of Catholicism (so far as Catholicism is a collection of doctrines). Anyhow, that the originators of the Catholic form of Christianity disliked Paul and his Epistles, whether genuine or pseudepigraphic, is shown by the way in which Tertullian refers to him as the "apostle of the heretics." Justin Martyr, Hegesippus, and others whose works have come down to us as orthodox, ignored the teaching of Paul, and founded their Christianity upon apocryphal or lost gospels which were the precursors of our Canonical Gospels; and their neglect of the Pauline Epistles was evidently not upon grounds connected with the authority of "the Law and the Prophets," the need for circumcision, and so on, but upon more definitely Christian doctrinal grounds.

The evidence is clear that these early Fathers of the Church, these very men from whom we first hear of the Gospels, were the ones who spoke slightingly of Paul as one admired by heretics, and who did not use his books in their churches. And the evidence is equally clear that the Pauline books were in high repute with those very Christians who were afterwards to be branded for ever as heretics by this then budding Catholic sect. Marcion, the leader, in the first half of the second century, of a large and very important body of Christians, based his doctrines upon Pauline writings, and, even as early as the middle of the second century, is found to be accusing the orthodox (subsequently so entitled) Christians of making interpolations in the Epistles of St. Paul so as to

[1] 1 Corinthians iii, 10.

bring them more into accord with the newly-published Gospels.

And the leaders of Gnostic Christianity are among the first to refer to the Pauline Epistles as authoritative. Basilides, Valentinus, and other founders of Gnostic sects, or leaders of Christian communities subsequently labelled as Gnostic heretics, are followers of Paul, and readers of his Epistles. Not until comparatively late in the history of Christianity is Pauline Christianity welded with Gospel Christianity into "orthodox" Catholicism. In the middle of the first half of the second century, before there is any definite evidence of the existence of our present Gospels, Basilides was teaching the Gnostic form of Christianity at Alexandria. Before the middle of the second century Marcion, the son of a Christian bishop in Asia Minor, was teaching in Rome a form of Christianity which was subsequently labelled as a heresy. In the middle of the second century Valentinus, who came from Alexandria, was in Rome teaching a Gnostic brand of Christianity.

From the evidence of many of the "Fathers" we gather these facts. Let us examine them further to see if they throw any light upon the disputes which were taking place earlier in the history of Christianity between Paul and some other teacher or teachers of Christian doctrines.

Chapter III

GNOSTICISM

As we saw in the last Chapter, we continually find in the Epistles, especially in Galatians, references to some rival form of Christianity; and it has always been recognized that Pauline Christians and Petrine Christians were in bitter opposition to each other. In some of the apocryphal writings the dispute is more clearly brought to light and more acrimoniously carried on.

For example, in the Clementine Homilies[1] Peter is reported as explaining that, though usually the best and purest doctrine appears first, in the case of Christianity the second form was better than the first, coming like light after darkness, and as knowledge upon ignorance; and in other passages it is argued that the former (Pauline ?) doctrines were the work of the Evil One, and that the later doctrines are the true religion as revealed by God. That the former doctrines were Gnostic cannot, at this interval of time, be proved; but that the leaders of the sect which afterwards grew into the Catholic Church inveighed with equal vehemence against Pauline doctrines and against Gnosticism suggests that these doctrines had something in common, even though they were not absolutely identical. In that case Gnosticism was most probably the first form of Christianity, Pauline Christianity being the halfway house to Catholicism. It is not intended to infer by this that Christian Gnosticism was older than the cult of Jesus, but that Gnosticism played an important and early part in turning the Jesus cult into Christianity.

[1] II, 16-17.

It must be remembered that the name "Christian" was not given to any sect, nor to any members of a sect, until long after the institution of the Jesus cult. According to the Acts (xi, 26), the name was first used in Antioch, when Paul and Barnabas were preaching there; but, as can be seen from the Epistles, the contemporaries of the first teachers of what we now term Christianity called themselves by a variety of names, such as "the saints," "the brethren," "the elect," though never by the name of Christians.

To the Jews this Latinized form of a Greek word would have meant nothing. "The Anointed One," or Messiah, meant to the Jews one selected to do the work of God. "The Anointed One," translated into Greek, was "The Christ"; and "The Christ" somehow came to have a more personal meaning than "The Anointed One" originally had. It was in Greek circles, or in circles influenced by Greek ideas, that the title "Christ" came to have its new meaning; and it seems that in pre-Christian Gnosticism that meaning, of a pre-existing spirit—an æon—would be found. In this sense it appears probable that Gnosticism turned the Jesus cult into Christianity.

These Clementine Homilies, referred to above, describe Peter as heaping scorn upon the teacher (Paul) who claimed to have had a vision of Jesus, as if a vision—real or pretended—could authorize a man to teach the true doctrines better than those who actually knew and saw the living Prophet! As these Homilies were probably not written until the end of the second century, the scorn is not Peter's, but that of a writer who was upholding the newer form of Christianity—the form said by its adherents to be founded upon the teaching of actual disciples of Jesus—against the older Pauline form of the religion.

In the second century a very large proportion of Christians were undoubtedly Gnostics. There is no

foundation for the assumption usually made, that Catholicism was either the older or the more genuine form of Christianity. The sect which is now referred to as orthodox, since its doctrines eventually became the foundations of Catholicism, denounced Paul as much as it denounced the Gnostics. It was itself founded upon the Gospels, both canonical and apocryphal, which were written long after the Epistles, and which were later than, or possibly contained revised versions of writings used by, the Gnostics. The latter were eventually classed as apocryphal, and lost or destroyed. Only fragments of them survived the fires of the eventually triumphant Catholic Church. One of the Gnostic Gospels, "The Ascent of Paul," purported to give an account of everything which Paul had done and seen when he ascended into the third heaven, and most of them—so far as we can judge from surviving fragments—had much in common with Pauline theology.

It is necessary for the student of Christian origins to be acquainted with these Gnostic theories, for, as we shall see later, the real problem which confronts him is to determine whether the first Christians believed that Jesus was a man who became Christ by inspiration, "adoption," or some other method, or whether they believed that Jesus was God, who became man by a miraculous conception or by some other means. Further, he will have to determine exactly what was meant by the various authors of our New Testament when they identified Jesus with Christ, or with "The Word." An acquaintance with the Gnostic theories teaches us what the doctrines of some sects of Christians were, and that these doctrines certainly influenced, even if they did not entirely guide, some of the New Testament authors. As our examination of the final doctrines proceeds it will become more and more apparent why it is necessary to refer to this old type of Christianity, which may at first sight appear to have only a pedantic interest. The Catholic doctrines, which

the Church of England inherited, are a development of a blend of Gnosticism with some other form of Christianity, to which we shall refer more fully hereafter.

It is often said that Gnosticism was unknown until much later than orthodox Christianity; but in the middle of the second century it was undoubtedly a doctrine of great importance, with a large number of followers; since Polycarp, Justin Martyr, and others, are busily engaged in inveighing against it from various points of view, and some of the Fathers of the Church were actually converts from Gnosticism.

Naturally, when the Catholics triumphed, Gnosticism was spoken of as a heresy which had arisen in comparatively modern times, and Catholicism as the true and original faith. Equally naturally, that form of Christianity would not be spoken of as the Gnostic heresy at an earlier date if it was the principal or only form of the Christian religion.

Our knowledge of the teaching of the various Gnostic sects is not great, depending as it did until quite recent years entirely, and as it still does chiefly, upon the biased and fragmentary refutations of "Fathers of the Church," who appear to have written most about the Gnostics when they were furthest removed in situation from them.[1] During the last century, however, a few hitherto unknown manuscripts have been discovered in the East, and we have learnt a little more about the doctrines of those early Christians who were called Gnostics. We have discovered, among other things, how greatly they were misrepresented by those who wrote to refute their doctrines. That they were misrepresented by their opponents is not a matter for surprise, and perhaps not even for condemnation. In doctrinal or political polemics men seek to find out their opponents' weakest points, not

[1] E.g., Irenæus (147–202), who lived at Lyons, wrote at great length about the Gnostic doctrines, though the Gnostics were mostly inhabitants of Alexandria.

to discuss their strongest; and in the case of religious, as well as of political, doctrines, disputants are generally unaware of, or unable to understand, each other's real theories. Moreover, at one time Gnosticism was itself sub-divided into more than fifty sects, each with its own bishops, organizations, and accepted books, and each with some divergency of doctrine from its fellows. From that mass of doctrines, surviving only in fragmentary forms, it has been possible to disentangle the principal theories held by these early Christians; and from various indications, as well as from the writings of the Fathers of the Catholic Church, it has been possible roughly to date the rise and fall of Gnostic Christianity.

Gnosticism dates from the first century B.C., and was originally a Theosophic movement, which attempted to reconcile such diverse elements as Judaism, Greek philosophy, Indian metaphysics, and Egyptian mythology. The problem which has hitherto been unsolved, and is probably insoluble, important though a solution would be, is whether from this blend sprang a Gnostic Christianity which formed the origin of Gospel Christianity, whether Gnosticism became Christian by assimilating part of the doctrines of an otherwise arising Gospel Christianity, or whether to a certain extent both of these processes took place, a Gospel Christianity (though prior to our Canonical Gospels) influencing Gnosticism, and Gnosticism at the same time reacting upon this Gospel Christianity. We can trace the latter influences.[1] Can we trace the former? Did the former ever exist? Gnosticism existed, as we have just stated, in the first century B.C.; the Pauline Epistles were probably written in the second half of the first century A.D.; and the Synoptic Gospels,[2] as we shall

[1] See Professor Gilbert Murray's "Four Stages of Greek Religion," pp. 143–46, for references to pre-Christian Gnostic worship of a Saviour and Redeemer.

[2] These are Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The Gospel according to St. John is much later.

see later, were not written before the first quarter of the second century A.D.

Thus in point of time the Epistles came between some form of Gnosticism and the Christianity which we are now distinguishing as Gospel Christianity. And in matter as well as in time the Epistles occupy this midway position.[1]

But these facts do not entirely settle the question, as Christian Gnostics had adopted, in the earliest of their writings with which we are acquainted, some purely Christian, though not orthodox, doctrines which were foreign to the Gnosticism of the first century B.C., and it is not clear whence these doctrines came—whether they were conceived in the bosom of Gnosticism, or adopted from some gospel story founded upon the facts alleged in the Gospels or upon the legends of some other religions.

That the attacks on Gnosticism made by the Fathers of the Church do not begin until well on in the second century need not have been due, as alleged by the orthodox, to the fact that Gnosticism began only then. It could have been, and probably was, due to the fact that Gospel Christianity began only then to compete with Gnostic Christianity. In the middle of the second century Gnostic Christianity and Gospel Christianity do not seem always to have been clearly distinguished. Valentinus, the leader of the Christian sect which was afterwards anathematized by the Catholics as heretic, was, on the evidence of the "Fathers" themselves, a member of the same Church as that considered by them as orthodox.[2]

Gibbon's words on this subject are well worth recalling[3]:—

[1] "The Apocalypse of John the Theologian," now known as "The Revelation of St. John," is believed to have been written at the end of the first century. It bears evident traces of Gnosticism, and, therefore, if this early date for it be correct (a matter of dispute), Gnosticism was at that time a perceptible element in Christianity.

[2] See Legge's "Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity," vol. ii, chap. ix, for discussion of this.

[3] "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," chap. xv.

> It has been remarked with more ingenuity than truth that the virgin purity of the Church was never violated by schism or heresy before the reign of Trajan or Hadrian, about one hundred years after the death of Christ. We may observe with much more propriety that during that period the disciples of the Messiah were indulged in a freer latitude both of faith and practice than has ever been allowed in succeeding ages.

The schism which eventually divided these two great branches of Christianity may, it is true, have been caused as much by a change in one as in the other. Gnosticism may have become more mystic, while Gospel Christianity became more materialistic. The one may have developed its symbols into a system of transcendentalism mixed with cabalistic words and signs, while the other more fully developed its story of a life. Whether that was so or not, they doubtless from one religion became, on diverse lines of evolution, two widely differing religions.

But before, and even after, the final rupture between Gnosticism and the sect which afterwards called itself Catholic each had borrowed from the other doctrines formulated after they had begun to branch away from each other.

In the fourth century the Emperor Constantine adopted the Catholic form of Christianity as the established State religion; by the middle of the fifth century Gnosticism, except for occasional recrudescences of minor importance,[1] had disappeared—persecuted out of existence by its successful rival.

The Gnostics claimed, as their name indicates, to be those who knew the Truth.[2] Many of their various doctrines require careful consideration by those who wish

[1] See Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," chap. xlii, for an account of a curious Manichæan Gnostic sect at the end of the sixth century, who claimed that the teachers of their religion had successively been Thoth, Saturn, Zoroaster, Pythagoras, Epicurus, John the Baptist, Christ, and a certain Mazdak. The sect is of interest chiefly because of this list of supposed teachers.

[2] Gnosis Theou = knowledge of God.

to inquire into the origin and development of Christianity. At present it is proposed only to consider the fundamental theory of Gnostic theology and two special forms of Gnosticism. In one of these, a very early form known as Docetism (Doketism), the Gnostics altogether repudiated the history of a living Jesus of flesh and blood, and regarded him as a phantasm (Dokesis). Their Jesus was a spiritual being who had appeared on earth in a spectral body—like a ghost. Later than this sect, but still at the beginning of the second century, another sect of Gnostics, known as the Adoptionists, believed that the Christ spirit entered Jesus—and sometimes enters other men in much the same manner—at his baptism. They believed that Jesus had become a Son of God (or had been adopted by God as his Son) when he was baptized by John in the wilderness.[1]

The Adoptionists believed that the prophet Jesus during his lifetime was the temporary abode of the Christ spirit, and that this spirit left him shortly before the Crucifixion, subsequently visiting the disciples who had fled to a cave on the Mount of Olives. And, apart from these two particular sects, the Gnostics in general believed that Christ was a spirit, a celestial being and not a human being, though some of them believed, as we have just seen, that this spirit was immanent in a living prophet, Jesus.

Generally the Gnostics believed in a Supreme God utterly transcending human comprehension, unknown and unknowable, but not responsible—since hypothetically He must be perfect—for the imperfections of matter or for the evil which exists in the universe. Hence He must himself be, as regards this world, inactive; and the creation of matter was believed to be the work of, and the government of the world the business of, some

[1] In the Gospel according to St. Mark there is no account of the birth of Jesus, but the story of his life begins when the spirit (of Christ) descends into Jesus at his baptism. This is pure Gnosticism.

lesser divinities, or spiritual beings, which had emanated from the Supreme God himself. These "Powers," "Archangels," "Elements," "Æons," and "World-Rulers of this Darkness" had created this world, and from on high they still governed it.

Among these spiritual beings, or subordinate gods—for such in effect they were, though not so called—were Logos (the Word), Sophia (Wisdom), Nous (Mind), Phronesis (Judgment), and Dynamis (Power), attributes of the Supreme God, but emanating from Him as separate entities.

These and other "Æons," together with the Supreme God himself, formed the "Pleroma," or "Fullness of the Godhead," as we frequently find it translated in our New Testament.

As we shall see later, the Epistles are full of references to these spiritual beings—the Æons;[1] and in one Gospel—that according to St. John—Jesus is explicitly identified with "the Logos."[2] But before the Epistles were written, and long before any Gospel was written, the Gnostics had elaborated this theosophical system of a Supreme God and his emanations. The minds of Egyptians, of Greeks, and even of the dispersed Jews, were saturated with this Western development[3] of the yet older Eastern theosophy of Hindus and Buddhists. Later on, as Christian Gnostics, they added to their lists of these Æons, or everlasting beings, the name of Christ.

The Gnostics spoke of Christ as "the joint fruit of the Pleroma"—that is to say, of the eight or twelve Æons[4] which together formed the Supreme Being. The spirit Christ was said to have been formed by this octoad or dodecad in its joint capacity, each individual member of it contributing some "Light" towards His making.

[1] Either translated "Ages" or "Eternal," or paraphrased in some other way.
[2] John i, 1–14.
[3] The names had changed, but the theory remained the same.
[4] Opinions differed as to the correct number.

"For in him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"[1] is a text which does not appear, to the ordinary orthodox Christian, to mean much beyond connecting Jesus with God; but to the Gnostic it was a definite statement of much more than this. It explained the Christ Spirit's origin from a corporation of Spiritual Beings who were themselves emanations from, and portions of, the Supreme Being.

This Christ had neither a local nor a chronological origin, as he was, according to the Gnostics, a Spiritual and Eternal Being, conceived, though indirectly, in the Mind of God—according to the anti-Gnostics, conceived in the Mind of the Gnostics themselves.

Gnosticism was an esoteric religion. Its doctrines were "Mysteries" into whose real meaning only the most learned and most worthy were ever initiated. The stories the Gnostics told were allegories, and not meant to be accepted as history save by the ignorant, who were not regarded as capable of understanding the mysteries. Their Logos was not made flesh, but was an abstract conception representing the Word or the Will of the Supreme God, just as Sophia represented his Wisdom.[2]

In the earlier stages of the Logos theory, "the Word" was distinctly differentiated from God. "The Word" was not only not God, but not even *a* God; only a spiritual effect proceeding from God. Eventually the Logos came to be regarded as a person. And later still the author of the Gospel according to St. John identified this Logos with the Jesus of whom the other evangelists had written.

There is nothing unusual in the gradual personification

[1] Colossians ii, 9.

[2] The Cathedral, now the mosque, of St. Sophia, for hundreds of years the very centre of imperial Christendom, the rival and for long the superior of St. Peter's at Rome, is dedicated to this Sophia—the Wisdom of the Gnostics transformed into a saint. The name remains to remind us of the facts, that the Sophia of the Gnostics was once regarded as even more important than the Logos which Gospel Christians converted into the Christ, and that she was afterwards relegated to the third place in the Pleroma and re-appeared as the Holy Ghost of the Trinitarians who founded the Church in Constantinople.

of an abstract idea; Greek mythology was built up by such processes. Neither is there anything strange in people who recognize the process as it took place in Greek mythology, overlooking its progress in Christian doctrine, since we seldom subject our own inherited conceptions or misconceptions to the same analysis as we do those of other people, and we are still less likely to do so when such an analysis is regarded as sacrilegious and the necessary data for such an analysis have been carefully concealed by several generations of theologians in control of education. The only thing that is strange is that any men who have examined the remaining extant data should refuse to apply in this case the same methods of judgment as they habitually use in corresponding pagan cases.

"The Word," according to some, was an angel—a messenger—from God, neither divine nor human, but something intermediate between God and man. The Epistles frequently contain a doctrine of that nature. For example, 1 Timothy ii, 5: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"—a text which, it may be noticed, flatly contradicts the Trinity and many other Christian doctrines.

But "the Word," in the original home of such metaphysical doctrines, among the philosophers of India, was not a person. There they spoke of Antar Atma, that part of each individual man's spirit which is a portion of the "Universal Soul." This spark of the Divine Spirit is the better part of men's natures, that little speck of divinity which prompts men to do good, which teaches them to recognize true wisdom, which makes them brothers of their fellow men and "sons of God." It was only the incurable materialism of the lesser breed of theologians which gave other meanings to words expressive of an awakened human soul. It was only theologians ignorant of Eastern theosophy who could interpret a claim to be one with God as a claim to be supernatural or unique. A realization of his oneness with God is the aim

of every Oriental sage, and it is claimed that some have attained that realization. A Yogi may, they say, eventually attain to Samadhi, which corresponds to the Gnosis of the Gnostics, and to the Dhyana of the Buddhists. He thus becomes one with God, a portion of the Atman or Universal Soul, an Enlightened One, a Son of God, a Christ, free from all desires, or passions, or thoughts of self,[1] and capable of seeing all things as one whole—the Infinite Reality. Finally the Yogi hopes to be absorbed in God, the Universal Soul, and thus attain Nirvana. But even before he reaches that final end a sage so enlightened, so imbued with the Christ spirit, or so awakened to Reality, speaks in the name of the Absolute, of God the Father, or of the Universal Spirit, the Brahman himself.

That is the doctrine common to all these religions in their ancient and pure form; but the theologians of each have evolved further and particularistic doctrines out of it, and have laid down these peculiar doctrines for the flocks whom they considered incapable of appreciating so lofty and so poetical an allegory. Because this doctrine was common to all these religions, it is not necessarily true. The points to be noticed are that it was not peculiar to the Gnostic form of Christianity, nor to that particular form of Christianity professed by the author of the Gospel according to St. John; that it was also taught in the pagan creeds which we deny; that it was not new when Christianity was founded; and that it has—though still surviving in the canonical John—been entirely overlaid by the Christ theories taken from Matthew and Luke.

The ancient allegorical meaning has been forgotten, and, except for a few students of the ancient theosophies, there are no longer any initiates.

All the cults which were contemporary with primitive

[1] Brahmibhutah, in the phraseology of Hinduism. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad it says: "The worshipper becomes one with the god he truly sees."

Christianity had their occult "mysteries." The general body of their adherents knew only the outlines of the mythologies connected with their particular religion. The more cultured members of each society were gradually initiated into the secret science of their faith. This was the knowledge of things seen and unseen, once revealed by the divine founder of the religion, and thereafter handed down, by the priests and initiates, to those fitted to receive it. This knowledge was the Gnosis of the pre-Christian, and afterwards of the Christian, Gnostics. The "mystery" plays which represented to the public the story of the life on earth of their god were only fully comprehended by those who had been initiated into the hidden allegorical meaning of the story. These initiates alone understood the real meaning of the various symbols exhibited, and of the various words and phrases used in these dramas; and to the initiates alone were fully explained the cosmological, transcendental, and ethical theories of the learned professors of the faith. The vulgar revelled in the rites of the cult; the intellectually inclined sought for knowledge in its secrets.

The esoteric meaning of these cults has not been revealed to us. The secrets were well kept, and probably, like most secrets which are really well kept, were not very wonderful. We can only guess, from fragmentary hints found in the works of ancient authors, the nature of the spiritual meanings which were gradually unfolded to the probationer, as he passed the various grades of initiation, in place of the natural crude meaning of the ceremonies and creeds. By the uninitiated, for example, Mithra was regarded as a semi-human, semi-divine being, who had actually lived on the earth; by the probationer he might be identified with the Sun; to the fully initiated he was probably the Spiritual Light which illumines the minds of wise men.

The ignorant thought only of the external appearance of the actors in the mystery plays; the initiate studied

the more significant inner meaning of the characters and actions represented.

They interpreted "their ancestral code allegorically, for they think that the words of the literal meaning are symbols of a hidden nature which is made plain only by the under-meaning."[1] The Gnostics, however, though they had their occult mysteries, were not—generally speaking—worshippers of gods or demi-gods like those worshipped by the adherents of these other cults. Some of them were followers of Plato, or of Pythagoras, or of Aristotle, or of some other human and historical philosopher. Plato has even been described as one of the founders of Gnostic Christianity, and is referred to by orthodox Christian Fathers such as Justin Martyr and Clement as "a Christian before Christ."[2]

Knowledge and wisdom were their aims; to understand all things—visible and invisible—and to learn how to live wisely, were the objects of their studies. They called themselves by various sectarian names, but the Catholic Fathers eventually lumped them all together as Gnostics and as the "first-born of Satan."

Though the Catholics suppressed the Gnostics, they were not able—indeed, they do not seem to have made any great effort—to purify Catholicism from its Gnostic elements. There still remain in some of the Epistles many passages which can be interpreted only by means of Gnostic doctrines, besides those in other Epistles, which are evidently aimed at Gnosticism. These letters are remarkable, not only because they contain little or nothing about the life and sayings of the Gospel Jesus, but also because they contain much which is expressed in phraseology so essentially Gnostic as to be meaningless apart from Gnostic doctrines. To the student of Christian origins it is of the utmost importance to note and

[1] Philo, "On the Contemplative Life." Translation quoted from "Fragments of a Faith Forgotten," by G. R. S. Mead.

[2] See "Christian Mysticism," by W. R. Inge (Bampton Lectures, 1899).

appreciate this fact. The vast majority of Christians read, or hear read, much in the Epistles which they either carelessly pass unnoticed, or wonderingly set down as archaic phraseology, with no definite modern meaning —mere theological rhetoric maybe. Gnostic terminology, involving acceptance of Gnostic mysticism, abounds in these writings, and is meaningless to those who have learnt only the doctrines of orthodox Christianity.

A few examples will now be given of the kind of expressions which were used in a Gnostic sense continually by the Epistle writers, occasionally by the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, and frequently by the author of the Gospel according to St. John. With these before him, the student will be able to recognize others, and to interpret texts which may have previously appeared to him enigmatical.

It will be noticed that, generally speaking, the earlier Epistles show signs of Gnostic influences, while the later show signs of anti-Gnostic bias. In the earlier, Christ is spoken of as a spiritual being who has always existed. He was the Rock which followed the Israelites in the desert and supplied them with water to drink.[1] The passing through the sea ;[2] the baptism unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea ;[3] the tempting of Christ during the wanderings in the desert, fifteen hundred years before Paul preached :[4] what meaning have these things apart from Gnostic allegorizations of the Jewish traditions ? How can these theological ideas be reconciled with what subsequently became, and still remains, orthodox doctrine ?

This Christ spirit was in Paul himself, just as it had been in Jesus : "Christ liveth in me."[5] And it might enter into his hearers : "Christ formed in you."[6]

God had sent forth his Son "that we might receive

[1] 1 Corinthians x, 4.
[2] Ibid, verse 1.
[3] Ibid, verse 2.
[4] Ibid, verse 9.
[5] Galatians ii, 20.
[6] Ibid, iv, 19.

the adoption of sons."[1] This seems to be a distinct reference to, and acceptance of, the Adoptionist doctrine referred to above.[2]

His Son is the creator of all things, including those essentially Gnostic beings "thrones," "dominions," "principalities," and "powers"; and, being the "first-born of every creature," He had existed "before all things."[3]

In the margin of the Authorized Version of our Bibles we find a reference, regarding this expression "the first-born of every creature," to Revelation iii, 14; and there we read of "the beginning of the creation of God." In Colossians the expression is used with reference to Jesus; in Revelation with reference to "the Amen." There is no orthodox doctrine to which these phrases can be referred; there is no meaning in them without reference to Gnosticism. Both evidently refer to the Gnostic Æon, "the First Man"[4]—an Æon at one time identified by some Gnostics with a pre-existing spiritual being, called Jesus.

The "thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers," are referred to in other passages in the Epistles. In one place they are mentioned after angels, and their names are followed by the phrase, "Nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, *nor any other creature*";[5] and in another[6] we are told that in heaven Christ will be placed "far above all principality, power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named .....which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." The Gnostic meaning is quite plain. Christ is, in heaven, to be placed above all these other spiritual beings, called Thrones, Principalities, and so on, who together with himself form the Pleroma—the complete

[1] Galatians, verse 5. [2] P. 32.
[3] Colossians i, 15–17.
[4] This Æon will be referred to again later on. "The First Man," "the Second Man," and the "First Woman" formed a Gnostic Trinity.
[5] Romans viii, 38–39. [6] Ephesians i, 21–23.

fullness of the godhead. Outside of these mystic theosophical doctrines of Gnosticism these terms have no meaning whatever in the connection in which they are used.

The Pleroma, or "fullness of the godhead," is constantly referred to in the Epistles. "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell"[1] means nothing unless it refers to the Pleroma—a Pleroma in which the author of the Fourth Gospel tells us all would share.[2] It is a pantheistic doctrine of the universal soul, the Atma of the Hindus, which contains all things and is contained in all.

In Colossians ii we are again informed that the Pleroma dwells in Christ; and we once more hear of principalities, powers, rudiments, or elements.[3] In Colossians iii we find expressed the same pantheistic view of the Christ Spirit as we have referred to above: "Christ is all, and in all"[4]—the spirit existing in all things, and in whom all things exist.

What, again, is the mystery which has been hid even from the Æons (ages) and kept secret since the world began, but which is now being made manifest and gradually to be disclosed until all men become "perfect"—or, in other words, reach the highest stage of initiation?[5] Can it be anything else than the esoteric doctrine about the Supreme—the name which cannot be named? In addition to these references to the Pleroma and the Æons which are to be found scattered throughout the Epistles, there are references to other Gnostic conceptions, which, to those who have not studied Gnosticism, appear to have

[1] Colossians i, 19.

[2] John i, 16. This Gospel is, of course, admittedly Gnostic in tone. John i, 1–14, is almost pure Gnosticism. In verse 3 the creation of the world is attributed to the Logos. The Supreme God was, according to the Gnostics, not himself the Creator. Out of chaos was evolved order by the Logos, who was thus the Creator, either alone or with the assistance of other members of the Pleroma. The Light is the Spirit; Darkness is Matter.

[3] Colossians ii, 8–10.

[4] Ibid. iii, 11.

[5] Colossians i, 26–28, and Romans xvi, 25–26.

a quite simple meaning, but are, by all theological scholars, acknowledged to have evidently been written as technical expressions taken from Gnosticism, the philosophy which was so widely known, at the time when these words were published, that no explanation of their meaning was either given or required. Such are the words "wisdom" and "knowledge," which generally stand for "Sophia," one of the principal Æons, and for "the Gnosis," or the "knowledge of the mysteries." Wherever these words or such phrases as "The Word," "The Light," "The Way," "The Dove," "The Truth," or "The Life," are used in the New Testament it may be presumed that they are being used in a technical sense, and that they have an allegorical meaning, probably connected with some celestial member of the Gnostic Pleroma.[1]

Paul's position midway between the Gnostic and Gospel forms of Christianity is shown, too, in his reference[2] to Apollos as a rival teacher; this Apollos being he who "taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John,"[3] a native of Alexandria, the very centre of Gnosticism. He designates four contending sects: first his own, secondly that of Apollos, thirdly that of Peter, and fourthly that "of Christ." The latter were presumably a sect which wisely refused to label themselves as the followers of any of the contending teachers; but the three first are evidently the Pauline Christians, the Gnostic Christians, and the Gospel Christians, or rather the sect which subsequently grew into the Gospel and Catholic Christians. We have in this chapter[4] a glimpse of the process that was going on. The Sophia (Wisdom) doctrine of the Gnostics is being

[1] Compare Lillie's "Buddhism in Christianity," pp. 233–240; also Mead's "Thrice-Greatest Hermes," vol. ii. p. 117. For explanations of the Gnostic technical terms see Mead's "Fragments of a Faith Forgotten" and the first volume of his "Thrice-Greatest Hermes."

[2] 1 Corinthians iii, 4: "One saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos." Cf. 1 Corinthians i, 12.

[3] Acts xviii, 24–25.

[4] 1 Corinthians i, 12–31.

modified. Sophia and Dynamis (Power) are identified with Christ, and a new doctrine is being taught which is not accepted by those generally regarded as wise men.[1] If it be asked, "Why should Paul inaugurate a new doctrine?", he himself supplies the answer.[2] The people he is addressing are "babes in Christ," unspiritual beings incapable of comprehending the symbolism and metaphors of the Gnostics. Throughout the Epistle this note is struck. The new doctrines are designed for those not yet able to understand the complicated metaphysics taught to the initiated. Even in the Gospels we sometimes hear an echo of this note. Jesus is said to speak only in parables, and to have said that "that which is holy" "must not be given to dogs," nor "pearls cast before swine."

But, though Paul's exact position with regard to Gnosticism is doubtful, the fact that he was acquainted with it and habitually used its technical expressions is incontrovertible. In addition to those terms to which we have already referred, he uses one expression which is conclusive evidence of his familiarity with Gnosticism.

In the well-known chapter[3] in which Paul—at other times so curiously silent about the person of Jesus—sets forth a list of the resurrection appearances, he finishes that list with the words: "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time"; and from the margin of our Bibles we learn that the words "one born out of due time" are a paraphrase for "an abortive," or what we usually speak of as "an abortion."

Now, that Paul should describe himself as "an abortion" seems meaningless to us unless we regard his doing so as an act of excessive humility. But the phrase, which should read, as it was written, "the abortion," is a well-known Gnostic technicality, meaning chaotic matter before it has been enformed—shaped and perfected—by

[1] 1 Corinthians i, 24–26. [2] Ibid, iii, 1–2. [3] Ibid, xv.

the spirit.[1] So Paul implies that he was, until the Christ Spirit entered into him, mere matter. According to the Gnostics, matter was evil, and spirit alone was good. Till matter was touched and organized by the pre-existing spiritual being, the Logos, or whatever it was by different sects called, it was "the abortion."

Though in this chapter Paul speaks, almost for the only time, about something mentioned in the Gospels, that one phrase suffices to show that it was through Gnosticism that he had arrived at his theological position.

The list of resurrection appearances does not at present concern us, and therefore need not be discussed here. The problem with which we are now dealing is that of Paul's relationship to the Gnostic Christians on the one hand, and to the Gospel Christians on the other. We have no definite proof that any Christian form of Gnosticism existed so early, but we have much negative evidence to show that Gospel Christianity certainly did not yet exist. The members of the well-established Churches to whom Paul addresses his Epistles are not Gospel Christians, but Gentiles probably influenced by some Jewish form of Gnosticism. When Paul told the men of Athens that he declared to them that very "unknown God" whom they already ignorantly worshipped,[2] to whom can he refer save to the Ineffable or Unknowable God of the Gnostics?

When we come to the later Epistles we still discover references to Gnosticism, but now the references are distinctly hostile. At the end of the first Epistle to Timothy we find the writer warning Timothy to avoid the science (Gnosis) "falsely so-called."[3] And again in the first Epistle General of John we find teachers who are evidently Gnostics being inveighed against. It begins[4] with the assertion that "the word of life" has been manifested; the "eternal life, which was with the

[1] See Mead's "Did Jesus Live 100 B.C.?", pp. 354–56.
[2] Acts xvii, 23. [3] 1 Timothy vi, 20–21. [4] 1 John i, 1–2.

Father," has been handled by them; and later on the author condemns those who do not believe "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh."[1] The references are obviously to Gnostics who still believe that Christ is a spirit—the eternal Logos—and who deny that this spirit became flesh and blood, as the writer of this Epistle himself believes.

Throughout the Epistles there are references to disputes between various unnamed sects of Christians; and, in the later Epistles, signs that their authors are hostile to one of those forms which were more or less accepted by the authors of the earlier Epistles.

For the present we shall not pursue our investigations into this matter any further. The Pauline theology will have to be referred to again later. But we must remember, as we continue our study of these Christian origins, that the doctrines found in the Epistles are by no means identical with those formulated after the appearance of the Gospels and the subsequent rise of that Christian sect which became the Catholic Church. We are not yet in a position to judge whether these Gospel doctrines were founded upon earlier though, for a long time, unrecorded Christian beliefs. Before we can do so we must investigate many other matters, of which one of the most important is the origin of our Canonical Gospels.

[1] 1 John iv, 3.

Chapter IV

THE GOSPELS

It is now necessary to turn our attention to the Gospels, and to study the evidence as to when and how the gospel story was written. A large number of books have been devoted to this subject, and a considerable measure of agreement has been arrived at concerning the authorship and dates of publication of these books. Here it will be possible only briefly to summarize the salient facts generally accepted by all competent commentators.

It is not until about the middle of the second century that we begin to find references to any documents which could correspond to our present Canonical Gospels, and it is still doubtful whether the earliest of these documents were the same as our present Gospels, or only earlier editions upon which these Gospels were founded.

It is said[1] that Papias referred in some letters (since lost), written in the first half or middle of the second century, to St. Mark's "Memoirs of Jesus," which Papias stated were derived from St. Peter, and to some "Sayings of Jesus" written by St. Matthew in Aramaic,[2] which Papias said that "each one of us has translated as best he could." Papias was Bishop of Hierapolis,[3] and none of his writings survive except in the form of alleged[4] quotations made by Eusebius about 150 years later. It should

[1] By Eusebius, Bishop of Cæsarea, who wrote at the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century. He lived from 265 to 340.

[2] Aramaic was the language used by the Jews after Hebrew had fallen into disuse among them.

[3] A city of Phrygia, in Asia Minor. Papias is said to have suffered martyrdom about 164 A.D.

[4] The authors of those times were not punctilious about verbal accuracy when making quotations.

be noted that, even if the testimony of Eusebius is accepted as accurate, these "Memoirs" and these "Sayings" are first heard of only when at least one hundred years have elapsed after the date assigned to Jesus, and that—assuming the latest possible dates for the deaths of the disciples—no eye-witness of the events related could have been alive at the time when the first mention of these books was made. It can hardly be claimed that a three-generation-old tradition is absolutely reliable.

Moreover, Papias is said to have published or spoken of "An Interpretation (or Exposition) of the Sayings of the Lord," so this translation of Matthew's Aramaic collection of precepts could have had no pretensions to verbal accuracy, even in its original form, and still less so when it eventually took the form of the Greek texts, whence our Gospel according to St. Matthew was derived.

Papias himself, according to Eusebius, recorded that he preferred oral tradition to any books; that the Mark "Memoirs" were "short and incomplete," being composed from the recollections of Peter as jotted down at various times and in no regular order by the latter's interpreter Mark; and that the "Logia" (Sayings) of Matthew were translated by every man to the best of his ability—evidently with considerable divergence of result.

There is no evidence of any kind for any earlier existence of any books resembling the Gospels; so, even if we give full credit to this second-hand evidence of Eusebius, there was, in the middle of the first half of the second century, no trace of any gospel story except some short Memoirs, upon which the present Mark was based, and those "Logia" or "Sayings of Jesus," written in Aramaic, which were afterwards used as the basis of the Greek Matthew. Eusebius also informs us that Hegesippus, who lived in the second half and towards the end of the second century, stated that he himself used the "Gospel according to the Hebrews" and other works current at that time, which are now classed as apocryphal.

So the orthodox Christian Hegesippus appears, on the evidence of the Church Father, Eusebius, to have been unacquainted with any of our Canonical Gospels, or certainly—if he did know of them—not to have regarded them as authoritative or important, since, although he freely quotes the Apocrypha in support of his doctrines, he does not ever mention one of our Canonical Gospels—a most extraordinary omission on his part if these Gospels were in existence and were believed to have been written by the persons whose names they now bear. Unwritten tradition, though 150 years had elapsed since the events of which he writes were alleged to have taken place, Hegesippus regards as being of the utmost importance; written stories of very little.

Justin Martyr, writing about 150 A.D., mentions some "Memoirs of the Apostles," but gives no names to show us to which of the Apostles he is referring. He, too, appears not to have been acquainted with any of our Canonical Gospels.

Taking into consideration these and many other similar facts, most commentators are agreed that our present Gospels were unknown until the second century was well advanced. A few theologians still maintain that they were first published at the end of the first century and the beginning of the second; but by far the greater number of critics assign their first appearance to the period between the years 120 and 150, or still later.[1]

That the early Christians expected the second coming of their Lord during their own lifetime, and therefore felt no necessity for recording in writing the sayings and acts which were reported by word of mouth, might partly explain the delay in committing the story to writing; but

[1] Even among the orthodox there can now be found but very few scholars who attempt to uphold the theory that these books were written by the authors whose names they bear, and none can be found who maintain that the Gospels as we at present find them in our Bibles are identical in every respect with the books as originally published.

the consequence of this delay, whatever its cause, must have been that, even with the most honest desire for putting down the truth and for distinguishing the truth from what was only report and romance, much must have crept into the story which was added by various Christians, who were not contemporaries of the eye-witnesses, either as their own ideas of what was right and probable, or as popular stories, evolved by rumour and brought to their notice. Any one who has any acquaintance with contemporary writings knows how freely the authors of that age gave rein to their imagination, and how what was considered suitable ranked equal with what really happened. After the lapse of three or four generations the story would lose nothing of romance nor of the miraculous in the telling, but would gain much of those ornaments of literature, but bugbears of history.

According to the Gospels themselves, the disciples who actually heard the message given were frequently rebuked by Jesus himself in his lifetime, because they misunderstood the words he uttered; and, even if the gospel story itself is an absolutely accurate record of events and speeches, these disciples altogether misunderstood the Messianic idea, and expected the Hebrew prophecies to be fulfilled and the return of Jesus as a King to reign over Israel and all other nations. When Jesus returned, in the immediate future, to set up this kingdom upon earth, they would—they expected—be his ministers, great officials governing part of his dominions. And the generation which succeeded the disciples were certainly mistaken about some matters, notably about this second coming which they so confidently expected in their own lifetime. How much more liable to error must the authors of these Gospels, written so long after the events they relate, have been! We are not, however, at present concerned with the possibility of error so much as with the questions of dates and authorship of these books.

As regards the Synoptic Gospels,[1] scholars and critics are in a great measure agreed upon the main features of their immediate origins.

Mark[2] was the earliest of these Gospels, and Matthew and Luke were written by men who had access to the Gospel according to St. Mark,[3] and who copied large portions of it verbatim into their own histories; but both Matthew and Luke made considerable additions to Mark, and notably both introduce the story of the Virgin Birth, to which Mark makes no reference whatever.[4]

But the chief additions, besides the Virgin Birth story, made by Matthew and Luke to Mark's Gospel consist of sayings of Jesus; and Biblical scholars attribute these additions to the traditional "Logia" of Matthew—those "Precepts of Jesus" written in Aramaic to which we have already referred. There are, however, other additions, made by both Matthew and Luke, which cannot be assigned to these Aramaic Logia, and which must therefore have been obtained from some other source or sources. The sources of these additions, common to both Matthew and Luke, are impossible to trace, and

[1] (συν = together; οφις = view; synoptic = common view.) The Synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and are so-called because of their resemblance to each other—a resemblance so close in many passages as to prove their common origin. Many texts are word for word the same in all three Gospels. If three different authors writing of the same event describe it in identically the same words, the presumption is that two of them copied the description given by the third, or that all three of them copied some earlier description; if they describe it in different words and with slight and unimportant differences of detail, the presumption is that they were either all three witnesses of the event, or were all three describing an event related to them in much the same way; and if they describe it entirely differently and in such a way that their descriptions cannot be reconciled, the presumption is that they could not all three have first-hand knowledge of the event, and that, in default of authentic details, each author, or at any rate two out of the three authors, supplied details from their own imagination.

[2] The names of the authors of the Gospels are here given according to the names assigned to them in our Bibles, though, as we have already stated, and as will become more clear as we go on, the real authors cannot have been the traditional evangelists.

[3] Or to some still earlier book upon which Mark itself was founded.

[4] This will be more fully discussed in Part II of this volume.

are now always referred by Biblical commentators to "Q," the unknown Quelle or source.[1]

Our difficulties in dealing with the Gospels are enhanced by the textual alterations and additions which took place before they reached their present forms. Origen, as early as the third century, writes of the numerous corruptions which had crept into the texts, and there is no doubt that the earliest manuscripts which have come down to us represent interpolated and amended versions of the original documents, and differ to a more or less considerable extent from those originals themselves.[2] The copyists of those days appear to have been in the habit of making marginal comments, references, and additions to their texts, and these notes were frequently, if not usually, incorporated into the text by the next copyist who had the manuscript.

St. Jerome, in the fourth century, tells us that there were as many different versions of Matthew's Gospel as there were manuscripts. Celsus complained that the Christians had re-written and altered their original Gospels. Our oldest manuscripts of the New Testament books are fourth-century versions, and even these were, by the compilers of our Bible, in some cases set aside in favour of still later versions. The end of Mark is an example of such an addition, the oldest manuscripts ending with chap. xv, and other manuscripts

[1] This source or these sources—perhaps some "primitive Gospel," now lost—could not have contained any account of either the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection, since, if these events had been described in the "source" which forms the nucleus of these Gospels, the accounts given of them by the different evangelists would have corresponded, as they more or less closely do regarding the events which were, by hypothesis, related in the original source. The curious omission of such important details is explained by the orthodox only by assuming that those among whom this "primitive Gospel" was current were already so familiar with the story of these particular events that it was unnecessary to record them.

[2] Even as late as the sixteenth century secular as well as sacred texts were constantly remodelled to suit the fluctuating ideas of the day. In Italy such reconstituted literary work was, when detected, known as a "Rifacimento." Forgery would be too strong a word, as the intention was merely to repair and bring up to date, just as a building might be restored.

at various points before the end of chap. xvi. St. Mark, in fact, refers neither to the Virgin Birth nor to any appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection,[1] but an account of the latter was added to his Gospel by some later hand, who probably obtained his materials from Luke.

The author of Mark's Gospel was supposed to be the Mark who was a follower of Peter, and would therefore have imbibed the teaching of that disciple; but, in view of the fact that the Gospel was unknown until long after all the attendants upon Peter must have been dead, it could hardly have been the work of the Evangelist to whom it was traditionally ascribed. This traditional ascription comes from Papias through Eusebius. According to the latter, Papias stated that the Presbyter John—a person of whom nothing else is known—told him that Mark wrote whatever he could remember of what Peter had taught about the acts and words of "the Lord." Later Fathers of the Church attempted to fortify this fourth-hand tradition by slightly varying the statement of Eusebius. Thus Fathers later in time than Eusebius, referring to his statement about Papias, improve upon its actual words by stating that they conveyed the meaning that Peter dictated and edited the Gospel, with whose contents he was made acquainted by a communication from the Holy Ghost!

However, since the time of Eusebius (about 300 A.D.) the Gospel according to St. Mark was always, by the orthodox, attributed to the "interpreter" of the disciple Peter. But against this fourth-hand evidence must be placed the internal evidence of the Gospel itself. The internal evidence is strongly against this Gospel having been written by any follower of Peter. Many of the

[1] The compilers—orthodox ecclesiastics authorized for the purpose—of the "Revised Version" of our Bible themselves point out that the best manuscripts of Mark end with verse 8 of chap. xvi. All the accounts of Jesus being seen after the Resurrection are late additions unknown to the earliest readers of Mark.

principal episodes related about that disciple in the Gospels according to St. Matthew and according to St. Luke are altogether omitted in Mark, or so described as greatly to minimize Peter's part in them.[1]

Again, according to Eusebius' account of what Papias reported, Mark "did not arrange in order the things which were either said or done by Christ," since he wrote down what he heard at discourses delivered by Peter on various occasions, which discourses were adapted for the occasions when they were spoken, and were therefore not consecutive nor in chronological order. Thus our present Mark (and to the earliest manuscripts of Mark the observation equally applies) is evidently not identical with the Mark to which Papias referred, as our Mark is a consecutive story and his was a collection of scattered episodes. It is consequently considered certain that the present Mark is not the work referred to by Papias, but that it is—even in its earliest extant form—another work, written by an author who appropriated the name of Mark; and it is probable that the work to which Papias referred may have been the once canonical work called "The Preaching of Peter," which is now lost. If this is the case, the argument for Mark being even as early as the middle of the first half of the second century falls to the ground, though the argument that Mark was the first of the synoptics remains as sound as ever.

The date of our Mark might be very much later than that assigned to it on the strength of Papias' statement about his Mark, as, apart from that statement as reported by Eusebius, there is no trace of Mark until much later in the second century. However, the Gospel according

[1] For example, the episodes related in Luke v, 1–11, Matt. xiv, 22–33, xvii, 24–27, and Luke xxii, 31–32, are omitted by Mark. For passages in which Peter's name is given less prominence than in the other synoptics, or in which he is called Simon instead of by his more glorious title, compare Mark i, 16–17, with Matt. iv, 18; Mark iii, 16, with Matt. x, 2; Mark viii, 27–30, with Matt. xvi, 16–19; Mark xiv, 13, with Luke xxii, 8; and Mark xiv, 27, with Luke xxii, 61–62.

to St. Mark is, whoever wrote it and whenever it was written, generally accepted as the earliest of those accounts of the life of Jesus which have come down to us, and not even the most orthodox of theologians claim that its author was an eye-witness of the things he relates.

After Mark the next Gospel to appear—so it is generally believed—was Matthew. Now, the Matthew of which Papias is said to have spoken was an Aramaic collection of "Sayings," and therefore cannot be identical with the consecutive history of acts as well as of sayings which we now know as Matthew—a Gospel admittedly written originally in Greek, and not a translation from any other language.[1] Judging from the silence about Matthew of those who mention the books in use by the Churches of their day, our Matthew must be of very much later date than the time of Papias. There may indeed have been towards the end of the life of Papias a Hebrew "Gospel according to St. Matthew," which might perhaps be identical with the in-those-days very popular "Gospel according to the Hebrews," but there is no evidence, and very little probability, that our present Matthew corresponds in any way with that book.

Jerome,[2] another of the accepted Fathers of the Church, writing about 392 A.D., claimed to have been in possession of a copy of the original Aramaic Matthew, and to have translated it into both Greek and Latin, but naively acknowledges that he refrained from publishing this original Matthew because it was better not to allow the general public to know how widely it differed from the canonical Matthew. It is unnecessary to enter at greater length into the problems about the authorship and

[1] Competent linguists are all agreed that the expressions used in this Gospel preclude any possibility of the Greek being a translation from Hebrew or Aramaic. It is essentially Greek in tone and spirit. It might, indeed, have been founded upon some Aramaic "Logia," but it cannot be a direct translation of them.

[2] 345-420 A.D.

date of this Gospel, as it is now acknowledged by all commentators that our present Matthew was not written by the disciple of that name, and that neither its author nor its date is known. These problems have been referred to only for the purpose of demonstrating, to those who have not previously studied such questions, the nature of the evidence which has to be taken into consideration before arriving at any conclusions. The evidence is discussed at great length in a large number of works. Here we can only state the conclusion arrived at by those qualified to judge, and indicate rather than discuss the reasons they have for coming to those conclusions.

It is generally believed that, soon after the publication of Matthew, the Gospel attributed to Luke, the travelling companion of Paul, also made its first appearance.[1] That Luke, the attendant on Paul, could not have written this book is now generally admitted. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch during the first quarter of the second century, writing on the Resurrection, makes no mention of, or quotation from, Luke, though Luke's account of the appearances after the Resurrection would have supplied him with exactly the kind of argument he required. Either Ignatius was not acquainted with the Gospel according to Luke, or, being acquainted with it, did not consider it authoritative enough to be quoted in argument. Yet Luke is said to have been a native of Antioch, and his Gospel would, if that were the case, have presumably been known there as early as elsewhere.

That Papias knew nothing of Luke is certain, as Eusebius, when endeavouring to make out the best case

[1] This Gospel was probably written by the same author as he who wrote the Acts of the Apostles, and is "the former treatise" of which the latter speaks in Acts i, 1. Both Luke and the Acts are addressed to Theophilus by this author, who does not pretend to be an eye-witness, but only to relate "those things which are most surely believed" by the sect to which he belongs (Acts i, 1; Luke 1–4). Even if he had been a follower of Paul, the latter was not an eye-witness, but only a convert, and a convert, moreover, who on his own showing disagreed upon doctrinal points with those who were traditionally acclaimed as eye-witnesses.

he could for the authenticity of the Canonical Gospels, quotes Papias' statements about the books in use in his diocese only in support of Mark and of Matthew's "Logia."

Justin Martyr appears to have been ignorant of the existence of any such Gospel, but Marcion—afterwards labelled as a heretic—and Irenæus, who lived in the second half of the second century, both had versions of it.

The first appearance of Luke, the last of the Synoptic Gospels, can therefore be dated with a high degree of probability at the middle of the second century; but, as we shall see later, this original Luke almost certainly differed in some important particulars from our present Luke.[1]

As a very rough guide, we can take the dates of the first appearance of the original versions of these three Gospels as Mark 120, Matthew 135, and Luke 140; but many years must have elapsed after those dates before the Synoptic Gospels took the exact form in which we now know them.

We now come to the fourth and last of our Canonical Gospels—that "according to St. John." This Gospel may have been published about the year 170, as Theophilus, who was made Bishop of Antioch at that time, is said to have quoted it. But even if it did appear so early as this, it did not immediately obtain any authoritative position, as orthodox Christian writers do not until much later refer to it as a book in use in their Churches.

Papias, bishop of a Church said by tradition to have been founded by the disciple St. John, would presumably have known of any Gospel written by the latter had it existed, and would not have spoken of written records as inferior to tradition had he known of the existence of any Gospel written by the beloved disciple of Jesus.

[1] See Part II, Chapter I.

Marcion, who knew the originals of the three Synoptics, which he speaks of as having already been considerably altered—chiefly, it appears, with a view of introducing Old Testament prophetical correspondences—never mentions John.

In view of these facts, it is certain that the disciple John could not have written the book, and indeed the author or authors, by using the third person in verse 24 of chapter xxi and by saying "We know that his testimony is true," avow that their work is intended as a record of some one else's testimony. We have no means, except from the internal evidence of the work, of testing their claim to record the testimony of an eye-witness, or of checking the quantity of the embellishments which they may have added to that testimony; but, having in view the lateness of date and the habits of contemporary pseudonymous authors, we must regard their claim with some suspicion.

In spite of such statements as that above quoted, in spite of no claim being made in the book itself to a first-hand apostolic origin, and in spite of its doctrines—so incompatible with an apostolic origin and with the character of St. John as depicted in other books[1]—this Gospel was for hundreds of years attributed by theologians to John, "the beloved disciple." Few things show better how blindly and uncritically tradition was for long accepted.

The most interesting and important point to notice about John is, after all, not the exact date of its appearance, but the fact that it embodies a Christian doctrine entirely different from that of the Synoptic Gospels.

The first fourteen verses of the Gospel set forth the doctrine of "the Word made Flesh." To this Word or

[1] E.g., John is described as an "unlearned and ignorant" man (Acts iv, 13). The Gospel, as we shall see, is in part a highly philosophical treatise. Such a man as the traditional John might, conceivably, have dictated the groundwork of that phantasy, the Revelation, which is just the kind of thing unlettered genius produces, but not the metaphysical theories about the Logos.

Logos of the Gnostics we have already referred.[1] The Logos doctrine, derived from the Greeks and originating in some still older civilization, has its counterparts in Hindu and other Eastern philosophies. It is simply a philosophic conception of a Spirit of Goodness and Wisdom which emanates from the Supreme God, his word and law poetically personified as the Holy Spirit. It is kindred to the Messenger idea such as Mercury represented, and by the century before the beginnings of Christianity the doctrine had been highly developed. The Logos, as conceived at that period by such philosophers or metaphysicians as Philo the Jew, was a spirit, vaguely personified, as all abstractions have at some time or other been by the ancients. The Logos, according to Philo, was the "Son of God," the "Image of God," the "First Begotten of God," the "Second God," the "Instrument whereby all things were created," a "Portion of God," a "Messenger from God," an "Advocate with God for humanity," the "Physician," the "Shepherd," the "Rock of Refuge," the "Well-beloved Child of God," the "High Priest of God," and many other things which were afterwards to be considered as titles of Jesus, though Jesus, at the time when these epithets were first applied to the Logos, had not yet been born.

The author of John annexed these epithets which had been applied to the Logos, and attached them to the Jesus of whom he wrote. He was the latest of our canonical evangelists, but the first definitely to identify Jesus with "the Word" "that was with God" "from the beginning," the Logos which had emanated from God, and was therefore part of God himself.[2]

John, after his short Gnostic preface, commences his history—as Mark does—with the baptism by John and the descent of the Holy Spirit into Jesus. He writes to show

[1] Chapter III, p. 33, et seq.

[2] The Logos theory contains the germ of our modern idea of "Natural Law," as the Logos was looked upon as immutable and eternal.

how the Christ Spirit—identified with the Logos—descends into, and thus becomes incarnate in, Jesus. He attempts to reconcile the ancient Gnosticism and the Christianity of the Synoptic Gospels by this identification of Jesus and Christ. His is the culminating argument for the doctrine, which was in the course of being accepted by some sects of Christians, of the Godhead of Jesus—a doctrine differing from that taught by Paul as well as from that taught by Mark.

With the Gospel of St. John the Catholic form of Christianity—though not yet called Catholic—really begins. It is the first blend of Gnosticism and the cult of Jesus. The Virgin Birth doctrine is yet to be added, and, nearly 150 years later, the Trinity doctrine to be invented; but John takes material that he already finds in the Synoptic Gospels, improves on it, and adds to it the Gnostic ideas of "the Word," "the Light," "the Truth," and "the Darkness." In the place of the simple kindly sayings of the Synoptic Gospels, we now find Jesus making rhetorical speeches, using more pretentious phrases, and indulging in argumentations. Renan describes this new style of speaking with which John embues Jesus as "in some measure the variations of a musician improving on his own account on a given theme,"[1] and certainly the more elaborate phraseology of John's version is more musical, though perhaps less convincing, less genuine sounding, less homely honest in tone, than that reported by his predecessors. The former Gospel stories and sayings which John incorporates are often altered, and always so as to emphasize the divinity of Jesus and his identity with the pre-existing Spirit which was a portion of God. Jesus, the Christ, was "from the beginning." He was "in the World, but the World knew him not." It is all an explanation of that last, apparently inexplicable, fact.

[1] Renan's "Vie de Jesus" (Michael Lévy Frères; third edition, 1863), p. xxxiv of Introduction.

The original Gospel ended at verse 29 of chapter xx. The last two verses of that chapter and the whole of chapter xxi are universally admitted to be late additions to a work which had already been brought to a conclusion. They are evidently appended for doctrinal reasons, first to glorify Peter and the Petrine form of Christianity, and secondly to allay the doubts of those who wondered why the second coming was still delayed, though the men who were said to be going to witness it were already all dead. The story of the miraculous draught of fishes—thus misplaced according to the Synoptics—is evidently symbolical, and not historical, the 153 fishes representing all the nations,[1] and Peter—he who had been said once to have been desirous of confining Christianity to the Jews—being the fisherman who hauled them in.

Over John's Gospel there were great disputes. It was constantly rejected by various sects of Christians. Its authenticity was questioned—by some because it was too Gnostic, by others because it was not Gnostic enough.

We have now concluded our apparently very long, but really very brief, survey of the circumstances in which our four Canonical Gospels appeared. From this summary we find that five points of primary importance emerge:—

1. That they were *not* written by the evangelists whose names they bear.

2. That they were compiled about, or more than, a hundred years after the date assigned to the death of Jesus.[2]

3. That any previous writings upon which they may have been founded were certainly of very much later date than the events they purport to describe.

4. That they are not independent accounts, but are all founded upon Mark or upon some one pre-Mark document; and

[1] Because 153 was the number of all the then known species of fish.

[2] Mark possibly only eighty-five years after; the others certainly more than one hundred years after.

5. That the oldest extant manuscripts of these books are fourth-century writings, that these manuscripts contain much matter additional to the original works, and that their texts differ occasionally from each other and from the Authorized Version as found in our Bibles.

It yet remains to be explained how books so late in date came to be accepted as authoritative, and to say something about the other Christian books with which they found themselves in competition when they did appear, and before they were selected as the only Canonical Gospels.

Chapter V

THE APOCRYPHAL BOOKS AND THE CANON

Of the books used in Christian Churches, and mentioned by name in the writings of the Christian Fathers of the Church during the first four centuries, at least seventy have entirely disappeared. Suppressed by bishops and emperors, destroyed by fanatics, and lost in various ways, they have left no traces, except an occasional quotation, behind them. The Gospels according to the Egyptians, according to the Hebrews, according to the Ebionites, of Jude, of Judas Iscariot, of Peter, of Andrew, of Barnabas, of Bartholomew, and according to the Twelve Apostles, and many other Gospels which were once in common use, but which were subsequently considered to be unorthodox, have disappeared. The same fate has befallen the Acts of Peter, of Thomas, of Andrew, of John, of Paul, the Travels of Peter, and other books purporting to relate the lives of apostles. Two epistles and a hymn attributed to Jesus himself have disappeared. The Book of James, the Revelation of St. Paul, the Revelation of St. Peter, and many other books which once ranked as equal to the books of our New Testament, have also ceased to exist.

Twenty-three books, at one time considered as genuine as any of our present New Testament books, after being in common use in Christian Churches for many generations, were subsequently excluded from the canon, but have survived, and can still be read by us. They throw considerable light upon the beliefs which were current among Christians in the second century and for some centuries after that. These are[1]:—

[1] For full texts see "The Apocryphal New Testament," by Hone; published by William Reeves, 83 Charing Cross Road, W.C. (undated).

1. *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary.*—This Gospel was used by Jerome as late as the fourth century. In some versions it was Gnostic in doctrine, and Jesus is not considered as being the Christ until after his baptism. Jesus is not described as of the line of David, but as a Levite through his mother, Mary. The usual version is devoted chiefly to the story of how Mary herself was born.

2. *The Protevangelion*, said to be written by James, first Bishop of Jerusalem, and "brother of the Lord Jesus."—According to this Gospel, Joseph was accused of corrupting Mary before his marriage, and both he and Mary were tried upon the charge and gave evidence about the miraculous birth.

3. *The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ.*—Published at about the same time as that at which our present Gospels appeared. Gnostic in tendency, but made use of by Eusebius, Athanasius, Chrysostom, and others. The Nestorians used this book until quite recent times. It may very probably have been founded upon the Gospel according to St. Thomas (see No. 4 below), in the same way as Matthew and Luke were founded on Mark. The twenty-two chapters of which it is composed are crammed with accounts of marvels and miracles said to have been performed by Jesus as a child while on a visit to Egypt. He mixes up the dyes of a cloth dyer, and then by a miracle changes all the clothes to the colour desired by their owner. His father, Joseph the carpenter, saws off a board too short, and Jesus miraculously lengthens it again. He cures a newly-married man of impotence. He re-transforms a man who has by witchcraft been metamorphosed into a mule. He cures Judas Iscariot, when the latter is still a boy, of a devil who leaves him in the shape of a dog. Jesus and his schoolfellows make images of animals out of clay, and he brings all these animals to life. He is born in a cave, and while still in his cradle he announces that he is the

Christ. He teaches his schoolmaster the real meaning and shape of the letters of the alphabet. His mother, Mary, performs miracles as well as himself.

4. *Thomas' Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ.*—Only four chapters survive. Jesus performs some exceedingly ill-natured miracles.

5. *The Epistles of Jesus Christ and Abgarus, King of Edessa.*—The first Epistle purports to be from Abgarus, inviting Jesus to visit him at Edessa in Mesopotamia, because the king has heard of the miracles which he performs. The second purports to be from Jesus, declining the invitation, but promising to send a disciple to cure the king of his illness "after my ascension." These Epistles are referred to as genuine by Eusebius, writing at the beginning of the fourth century. They were at one time used in England as genuine but uncanonical, and some distinguished British divines attempted to get them admitted to the Canon.

6. *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, or *The Acts of Pontius Pilate.*—Probably written towards the end of the second century, and certainly in common use at the end of the third century. It was frequently appealed to, as evidence, by Christians of the succeeding centuries. It purported to be part of the official records of Pilate, and was said to have been found among the Roman archives at Jerusalem. It is really, like many other writings both canonical and apocryphal, the pious fraud of a Christian writer, who hopes to convert the heathen by miraculous evidences of Christianity. Jesus is accused before Pontius Pilate of being born out of wedlock, and of being a conjurer or magician. Various witnesses testify to the miraculous cures which he has effected. Many dead saints arise from the grave at the hour of the crucifixion, and subsequently spend their time in offices of devotion. Two of them relate their experiences in Hell, and how they there met Adam and Isaiah. Jesus Christ himself visits Hell. Beelzebub, "the prince of Hell," upbraids

Satan, "the keeper of the infernal regions" and "the author of death," for crucifying Jesus; and Jesus gives Beelzebub dominion over Satan (chap. xviii). Annas and Caiaphas tell Pilate that they had made a mistake in crucifying Jesus, and that they now know that he was the Christ and has risen from the dead.

The pictures, which were once very common in books of devotion and in churches, of the "Harrowing of Hell," all purported to portray the descent into Hell described in this Gospel. Jesus, leading Adam by the hand, and followed by "all the saints of God," leaves the dreadful place of torment; and Michael the Archangel waits to conduct the party to Paradise. The only two saints who were not of the party were Enoch and Elijah, who had ascended to heaven without first going to hell.

7. *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Laodiceans.*

8. *The Epistles of St. Paul to Seneca,* and the replies of Seneca thereto.

9. *The Acts of Paul and Thecla.*

10. *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians.*

11. *Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians.*

12. *General Epistle of Barnabas.*

13. *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians.*

14. *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians.*

15. *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians.*

16. *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans.*

17. *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians.*

18. *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnæans.*

19. *The Epistle of Ignatius to Polycarp.*

20. *The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians.*

21. *The First Book (or Visions) of Hermas.*—Frequently referred to by Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Athanasius, Tertullian, and other Christian writers.

22. *The Second Book (or Commands) of Hermas.*

23. *The Third Book (or Similitudes) of Hermas.*

Besides these there are eight other alleged Epistles of Ignatius, written respectively to the Philippians, Hero

of Antioch, the Antiochians, the Tarsians, Mary of Cassobolita, the Apostle John (two epistles), and the Virgin Mary. All these are now generally admitted to be spurious, but were at one time accepted as genuine.[1] And in addition to these and to many other Gospels, Epistles, Revelations, and Acts, there was a large quantity of literature, both patristic and gnostic, which dealt with doctrine. Most of this is now lost, and is known to us only by references and quotations made by the later Fathers. Much that remains is almost meaningless to men whose ideas are not cast in the metaphysical moulds of the second century. But these were the books used, as the Fathers have left on record, in the second-century Churches, many of them long before any mention of our present canonical works is made, unless the words of Papias, to which we have already referred, related to such works. Throughout the second century various lost works are frequently mentioned by name, whereas until nearly the end of it no reference save this doubtful one of Papias can be found to the Canonical Gospels.

During these first two centuries each Church exercised a free choice in the selection of the books which it used. Some Churches rejected the Old Testament, but most of them used these ancient Jewish books and regarded them alone as "Scripture." The Gospels and other Christian literature which they read were not considered to have authority as "Scripture," and it was not until towards the end of the second century that any attempt was made to draw up a list of such books and to invest it with authority as a "canon."

At that period no one Church had sufficient authority to enforce agreement upon such matters. The pious fictions about apostolic succession, and the consequent

[1] The Epistles of St. Ignatius are discussed in chap. ii, part ii, and also in the Preface to the sixth edition of "Supernatural Religion."

pre-eminence of the Bishop of Rome, had not been invented; and the sect which afterwards called itself Catholic was not yet in a position to define orthodoxy, and to suppress other sects as heretics.

During the third and fourth centuries many canons were compiled, but none of them were either permanently or universally accepted. Of these by far the most important was that of St. Athanasius, drawn up early in the fourth century. Christianity had just become the established religion of the Roman Empire, and, though the final victory of the Athanasians over the Arians had not taken place and the exact form of Christianity which was to be called orthodox had not been settled, St. Athanasius was for the time being in chief favour with the as yet unbaptized Emperor. The curious transactions which brought about the triumph of Catholicism under the Emperor Constantine can be studied in the pages of Gibbon ("Decline and Fall," chaps. xx and xxi). They lie outside the scope of the present work, and at present we are concerned only with the Nicene Council, at which the Athanasian canon was decided upon. Of this Council Sabinus, Bishop of Heraclea, declared that, with the exception of the Emperor himself and one other person, the three hundred assembled bishops were "a set of illiterate simple creatures, who understood nothing." However, whether these three hundred bishops and their as yet unbaptized patron and emperor were qualified by learning to distinguish the genuine from the spurious, or whether they were ignorant, does not seem to have much mattered, as questions about the dates and authorship of the books were regarded as subsidiary to questions about the orthodoxy of the doctrines to be found in them. It was these prelates—subject to every kind of motive, such as fear of being declared heretics, desire to agree with the powerful patriarch, anxiety to bring the lengthy proceedings to a close—who, by their votes, decided which books were to be called inspired; and it was the canon

thus decided upon which became the basis of all subsequent canons, including our own.[1]

The canon-makers were never concerned with questions about the authenticity of the books. "The Church has distinguished between ancient books which she decided were apocryphal and other early books which she pronounced to be inspired; but in making the decision she was always influenced, not by a critical examination of the authenticity or origin of the writings, but solely by the question of what support they gave to the orthodoxy of the moment. If the book accorded with her dogmas, it was said to be inspired; if it did not support them, it was destroyed or labelled apocryphal."[2] The Church accepted these books because they told a story which she wished men to believe, and for no other reason. She rejected other books which earlier Christians had used because they gave versions of the story which she did not wish men to believe, and for no other reason. The newer books contained the newer doctrine—that current at the moment; the older books contained the old doctrine, in which men of the triumphant sect had ceased to believe.

These facts are now recognized by all theological students, even the most orthodox, and modern apologists are driven to the use of some very quaint arguments in defence of their theory that the Gospels are good evidence

[1] In the Preface to the second edition of his "Apocryphal New Testament" Hone quotes from an alleged Synodicon to this Council, written by Pappus, an absurd story to the effect that the method by which the "inspired writings were selected from the uninspired was that all the books in question were placed under the communion table in a church, and that then the bishops prayed to the Lord that the inspired writings might get upon the table while the spurious ones remained underneath, and that it happened accordingly." But, though the implication that St. Athanasius and his party worked a pretended miracle is unjustifiable by any evidence of value, it is certain that there was considerable difference of opinion as to the books which should be accepted, and that the decision was not arrived at by any critical examination of, nor by any real agreement as to, their authenticity.

[2] "Les Légendes Pieuses," by Maury, quoted by Buckle, "History of Civilization in England," vol. ii, p. 284.

of facts. Few of the arguments one hears upon any subject are so strikingly a reversal of the advocate's own previous contentions, and so absolutely opposed to experience, as the one used by some of the orthodox to reconcile the lateness of date, which they have been driven to admit, with the doctrinal authority which they still wish to claim for these books. This is to the effect that the very lateness of a Gospel adds to its value; "for it is a paradox to maintain that the longer men thought about our Lord the less they understood him."[1] "Certainly it has not been the verdict of Christian experience that the writings which were latest in date are furthest removed from the spirit of the master."[2]

To a biographer who compares all the first-hand authorities, and studies contemporary evidence in the light of subsequent knowledge, such an argument might apply. But the Gospel narratives are presented to us as first-hand evidence—as, indeed, the only evidence of the facts which we are asked or ordered to accept. How, then, can the fact of their being late be accepted as an added value to their evidence? If it is found that the later the evidence the greater is its agreement with the orthodox conception of the facts, it is obvious that the evidence was founded on the doctrine, and not the doctrine on the evidence.

Doubtless many of the "apocryphal" Gospels were eventually so classed on grounds which were not doctrinal only. The events recorded in some of them must have been a little too fanciful and miraculous even for the miracle-loving Fathers of the third century. Tertullian, who boasted that he believed *because* it was impossible ("Certum est, quia impossibile"), must have realized that some stories related in the "apocryphal" Gospels were risible as well as impossible. Some of

[1] "Foundations: A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought," by Seven Oxford Men; footnote on p. 202.
[2] Ibid, p. 209.

the stories, such as those of the descent of Jesus into hell, were retained, and eventually enshrined in the Creeds, though the only books which recorded them had been rejected as apocryphal; but the tendency among the better-educated Fathers must have been to reject the more fanciful accounts in favour of the more sober. Doctrinal considerations were undoubtedly the chief concern of the canon-makers—that is admitted by themselves; but it is highly probable that the derisive comments of the pagans influenced the Fathers in their choice of books which did not contain quite such a curious assortment of childish miracles as those recorded in "The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ."

The contents of the books which were eventually labelled "apocryphal" varied from the sublime to the ridiculous, in illustration of which statement two stories will now be quoted from the "Acts of Thomas" and the "Acts of John" respectively.[1] The first story is told about the "Apostle Judas Thomas, or the Twin of Jesus," who goes to India as the first Christian missionary:—

"When Thomas arrives in India he is brought before the King, and, being questioned as to his knowledge of mason's and carpenter's work, professes great skill in either department. The King asks him if he can build him a palace. He replies that he can, and makes a plan which is approved of. He is then commissioned to build the palace, and is supplied abundantly with money for the work, which, however, he says he cannot begin until the winter months. The King thinks this strange, but, being convinced of his skill, acquiesces. When the King goes away Thomas, instead of building, employs himself in preaching the Gospel, and spends all the money on the poor. After a time the King sends to know how the work is going on. Thomas sends back word that the palace is

[1] The versions which follow are quoted from Mead, "Fragments of a Faith Forgotten," pp. 424–26 and 443–44; both versions being taken by Mead from Salmon's "Introduction to the New Testament."

finished all but the roof, for which he must have more money; and this is supplied accordingly, and is spent by Thomas on the widows and orphans as before. At length the King returns to the city, and when he makes inquiry about the palace he learns that Thomas has never done anything but go about preaching, giving alms to the poor, and healing diseases. He seemed to be a magician, yet he never took money for his cures; lived on bread and water, with salt, and had but one garment. The King, in great anger, sent for Thomas. 'Have you built me a palace?' 'Yes.' 'Let me see it.' 'Oh, you can't see it now, but you will see it when you go out of this world.' Enraged by being thus mocked, the King committed Thomas to prison, until he could devise some terrible form of death for him. But that same night the King's brother died, and his soul was taken up by the angels to see all the heavenly habitations. They asked him in which he would like to dwell. But when he saw the palace which Thomas had built he desired to dwell in none but that. When he learned that it belonged to his brother, he begged and obtained that he might return to life in order that he might buy it from him. So, as they were putting the grave clothes on the body, it returned to life. He sent for the King, whose love for him he knew, and implored him to sell him the palace. But when the King learned the truth about it he refused to sell the mansion he hoped to inhabit himself, but consoled his brother with the promise that Thomas, who was still alive, should build him a better one. The two brothers then received instruction, and were baptized."

If that story were translated into the beautiful language employed by the authors of our Authorized Version of the New Testament, it would rank high as an example of religious literature; but, on the other hand, if it were incorporated in that collection of books it would lose in ethics what it gained in prose, as, instead of being regarded as an allegory, it would be related as a fact, and

we should be bidden to believe in another resurrection story, as well as in a marble and gilt edifice raised on the floor of heaven.

The other story is told of John and some of his disciples journeying on some missionary work :—

"On their journey the party stopped at an uninhabited caravanserai. They found there but one bare couch, and, having laid clothes on it, they made the Apostle lie on it, while the rest of the party laid themselves down to sleep on the floor. But John was troubled by a great multitude of bugs, until, after having tossed sleepless for half the night, he said to them, in the hearing of all: 'I say unto you, O ye bugs, be ye kindly considerate; leave your home for this night, and go to rest in a place which is far from the servant of God.' At this the disciples laughed, while the Apostle turned to sleep, and they conversed gently, so as not to disturb him. In the morning the first to awake went to the door, and they saw a great multitude of bugs standing. The rest collected to view, and at last St. John awoke and saw likewise. Then (mindful rather of his own grateful obligation to the bugs than of the comfort of the next succeeding traveller) he said: 'O ye bugs, since ye have been kind and have observed my charge, return to your place.' No sooner had he said this, and risen from the couch, than the bugs all in a run rushed from the door to the couch, climbed up the legs, and disappeared into the joinings. And John said: 'See how these creatures, having heard the voice of a man, have obeyed; but we, hearing the voice of God, neglect and disobey; and how long?'"

The story will awake memories, perhaps tender, in the minds of all those who have suffered the hospitality of caravanserais, dâk bungalows, and rest houses.

In the second, third, and fourth centuries the books containing these stories ranked equal to or above those now in the canon.

Successive generations of ecclesiastical authorities

gradually weeded them out, and in the year 692 the Quinisextine Council formally laid down the final Catholic canon. Even after that date some Churches and some sects used other books and repudiated certain Canonical books; but when the Reformation took place the new Protestant Churches accepted, though not always without considerable demur, the established canon of the Catholic Church.

Our Church of England New Testament is, then, a collection of books selected by fallible men from about 150 books used by the Christians of the first few centuries of our era, and selected not because they were the oldest or the most authentic or the most reliable, but because they, better than the others, gave support to the doctrines in which these men believed. We must now examine how far even the books thus carefully chosen do, in fact, support the doctrinal edifice built by the Catholic Church and inherited by the various Protestant sects of our own day, and note in the materials used for that edifice any traces of doctrines derived from the more numerous books which were rejected.

PART II

THE VIRGIN BIRTH STORY

Chapter I

THE EVIDENCE FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Epistles make no mention of a Virgin Birth, and such comparatively few references as there are to Jesus in these, the earliest writings of our New Testament, do not in any case support the doctrine of his Virgin Birth, and sometimes appear quite incompatible with any such doctrine.

Neither the Epistles, nor the Acts, nor the Revelation refer either explicitly or even implicitly to a Virgin Birth. Some of the references which are made to Jesus in these books are compatible with the Gnostic doctrines, which will be discussed later, of a divine soul incarnate in an ordinary human body.

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."[1] Here and in the following verses we are told that through the redemption, and by the Spirit, of One who was (not begotten, but) "sent forth" by God, other men might also receive the "adoption of sons" and cry "Abba Father."

Others plainly set forth the doctrine of a pre-existing divine being who has no taint of humanity :—

"Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God."[2]

".....our Lord Jesus Christ.....Lord of Lords; who alone hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no

[1] Galatians iv, 4, 5. [2] Hebrews vii, 3.

man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see."[1]

Others are compatible with the Gnostic "docetic" doctrine, already referred to, of a spiritual being clothed in the apparent likeness of man:—

"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."[2]

Others again, and these the most numerous, teach the doctrine, which apparently at an early period was held by all Christians, that Jesus was a man who became the divine Christ when God raised him from the dead, up till which time he had been entirely human:—

"Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."[3]

"Jesus Christ of the seed of David....."[4]

The divinity of Jesus is even plainly denied, and he is said when he became "The Christ" not yet to have been wholly divine:—

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."[5]

The most striking thing about these and a great many other passages of similar purport, which might be quoted from the Epistles, is that the Virgin Birth is never mentioned, though they, above all others, lend themselves to an explicit statement of the fact, if it was known to the writers. They are intended as explanations of the nature of Christ. Would it not have been simpler, if the authors knew that such was the case, to state that God had actually begotten Jesus?

Moreover, no references can be found in the Epistles to Mary or to Joseph, or to any other details of the birth story, though we are in one passage warned "neither give

[1] 1 Timothy vi, 14-16. [2] Romans viii, 3.
[3] Romans i, 3–4. [4] 2 Timothy ii, 8.
[5] 1 Timothy ii, 5.

heed to fables and endless genealogies,"[1] by a writer who may have heard rumours of some new teaching.

The Gospels, it is admitted by every one, were not yet in existence when these Epistles were written, and it is evident that the writers of the Epistles had either never heard of or did not believe in these stories of the birth and infancy of Jesus.

The Acts of the Apostles, too, is written by an author who either knows or cares nothing about the birth of Jesus, and regards his life only as beginning with the baptism by John. This is distinctly stated in i, 22, in which the beginning is said to be "from the baptism of John"; and again in x, 37, in which it is stated that "the word" began "after the baptism which John preached."

If, as is generally admitted, the author of the Acts is identical with the author of Luke's Gospel, this is further proof of the lateness of the introduction of the birth story into the Gospel. All the emphasis laid upon the baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit would be unnecessary if the incarnation was a fact; yet not only Mark and John, but even Matthew and Luke, so emphasize the miraculous nature of this baptism by John.

According to the Acts, it is not only Paul who preaches that Jesus is descended from David—"Of this man's [David's] seed hath God, according to his prophets, raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus"[2]—but also Peter, the usually accepted teacher of the gospel story as opposed to the transcendentalism of the Epistles, who so preaches. He too is described as teaching that the man Jesus, the fruit of David's loins, according to the flesh,[3] became inspired by the Holy Spirit at his baptism—"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were

[1] 1 Timothy i, 4. [2] Acts xiii, 23. [3] Acts ii, 30.

oppressed of the devil; for God was with him,"[1] and how Jesus was not born, but eventually made, Christ. "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."[2] As Mary was not of the line of David,[3] all references to a descent from David must mean through Joseph.

Again, in "The Revelation" we find nothing about the Virgin Birth, but some texts which imply a natural descent through Joseph from David, as, for example, "I am the root and the offspring of David."[4]

When we turn from the Epistles to the earliest of the Gospels, that "according to St. Mark," we still find no reference to the Virgin Birth, or even to the parentage or childhood of Jesus. The story related by this evangelist begins with the appearance of Jesus "from Nazareth of Galilee," to be baptized by John in the Jordan,[5] and at that ceremony to receive the Christ spirit which distinguished him from other men.[6]

Mark never mentions the name of Joseph, and refers to Jesus himself as the carpenter, in the passage corresponding to the one in which Matthew speaks of the carpenter's son, and to the one in which Luke speaks of the son of Joseph. He appears to know nothing at all of the birth of Jesus, either natural or supernatural. He is concerned only with explaining how Jesus became imbued with the Christ spirit.

The dove was a symbol, in many Oriental religions, of the Holy Spirit, or of some deity who corresponded with what the Christians afterwards called the Holy Spirit (or

[1] Acts x, 38. [2] Ibid, ii, 36.

[3] In the Apocrypha it is distinctly stated that Mary was a Levite, and that tradition appears to have been generally accepted.

[4] Revelation xxii, 16. [5] Mark i, 9.

[6] Mark i, 10, "like a dove descending into him," is said to be a more accurate translation of the Greek than the "like a dove descending upon him" of our Authorized Version. In any case, it is implied that the Christ Spirit thus entered his body, and that it was then that Jesus became the Christ.

Holy Ghost, as it is frequently translated in our Bibles). "The Christ" means "The Anointed One," just as "The Buddha" means "The Enlightened One"; and by this anointment with the Holy Spirit, Jesus was believed to have become *The* Christ par excellence.[1]

The dove descending on the head of Jesus, and his consequent inspiration of the spirit of Christ, corresponds with the Buddhist story of Gautama lying down under the Bo Tree and attaining to Buddhahood. The Christ spirit entered into Jesus in the same way as the Buddha spirit, on very rare occasions, enters into mortals. From the purely spiritual idea of a Buddha, the latter gradually came to be identified with a human being. Thus do all religions tend to materialize their spiritual conceptions, and to make idols out of their ideals.

The spiritual Christ of the Gnostics was only figuratively an "anointed one," but the spiritual being and the human Messiah, the real anointed one, were eventually combined into one conception.

After Mark the next Gospels in order of appearance were Matthew and Luke; but before we consider these we will refer to John, the latest of our Canonical Gospels. John too makes no reference to the Virgin Birth, and has texts which preclude it. In his preamble (i, 1–14) he explains his doctrine that Jesus is the Logos (Word), the pre-existing eternal Being who had come down from heaven and would eventually return to heaven; not human, though temporarily "made flesh." That is the doctrine of the Gnostic who wrote the Gospel according to St. John; but he recounts that others regarded Jesus as the son of Joseph. Philip says (i, 45): "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the

[1] The words "Messiah" and "Christ" both literally mean "Anointed." To the Jews an anointed person meant one consecrated to God. The Kings and the High Priests were called "The Anointed." The further development of the word "Messiah" to mean one anointed by God as the deliverer of the Jews began only at about the beginning of the Christian era, or a little before it; and the specialization of the Greek word "Christos" came about, of course, still later.

prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." The Jews say (vi, 42): "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" On these sayings the evangelist passes no comment, such as might be expected if the Virgin Birth story was known to or believed in by him.

If we assume, as the Churches most unwarrantably assumed, that John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," wrote the Gospel and the Epistles which bear his name, the silence of the evangelist is still more strange. He, above all others, would have been the disciple most intimately acquainted with the history of Jesus; yet he says nothing about any supernatural birth—an event most worthy of notice had he known of it, or even ever heard it mentioned.

According to John and to the other evangelists, all the disciples and followers of Jesus looked upon Joseph as his father; and Jesus himself makes no claim to a supernatural origin, unless his reference to his metaphorical Father be strained to imply such a claim.

Thus neither the authors of the Epistles which are the earliest of our New Testament books, nor the authors of the earliest and the latest of our four Canonical Gospels, make any mention of a Virgin Birth.

The Gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke are our only authorities for the story, and they, as we have already seen, were not written until about the middle of the first half of the second century.[1]

Then for the first time, more than a century after the

[1] Some of the "apocryphal" Gospels have the story in even greater detail than the canonical accounts; but most of these Gospels are also late, and most of them are so filled with marvels, or otherwise so incredible, that even the miracle-loving framers of the Canon rejected them as fiction. It is, however, worthy of notice that some of the earliest Christian writings explicitly deny the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, and that in at least one of them—the Acts of St. Thomas, which was used in many early Christian churches, though eventually excluded from the Canon—Jesus and Thomas were said to be twins. St. Thomas, as is well known, was called "Didymus," which means "the twin."

date assigned to the birth of Jesus,[1] and nearly a century after the date assigned to his death, appears the first mention of the Virgin Birth—a dogma which the Catholic Church subsequently made orthodox, and a belief in which most Christian Churches to this day still insist on treating as a test of orthodoxy, in spite of the fact that the bulk of educated modern opinion is against it. No man can take orders in the Established Church of England unless he avows his belief in this miracle, although many of the better-educated clergy have ceased to credit it, and although even the Bishop of one of the most important

[1] The date accepted by the Catholic Church for the birth of Jesus, when at the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century a Christian calendar was first instituted, was called the year 1 A.D.; but as this date was afterwards found to be irreconcilable with the gospel references to Herod, who died in the year 750 A.U.C. (corresponding with the year 4 B.C.), the Churches now give that date—4 B.C.—as the date of the birth of Jesus. The Greek Church was never in complete agreement with the Roman upon this matter. (See Dean Farrar's "Life of Christ.")

It was at this time, the end of the sixth century, that Christians began to use the chronology B.C. and A.D., with which we are now so familiar as to be apt to look upon it as natural. Up till then in Rome, and over a great part of the Roman Empire, chronology had, for a long time, been based upon a (fictitious) date supposed to be that of the foundation of Rome, the year 1 A.U.C.

It is to Dionysius Exiguus, who lived in the first half of the sixth century, that we are indebted for the Christian calendar. He apparently based his calculations upon the third chapter of St. Luke, allowing one year to elapse between the event recorded in the first verse and the baptism episode recorded in the middle, and therefore took the sixteenth year of the reign of Tiberius to correspond with the thirtieth year of the life of Jesus spoken of in verse 23. This brought the birth of Jesus into the year 754 A.U.C. of the Roman calendar, and that year thus became the year 1 of our era. As the men of the seventh century, and for many hundreds of years thereafter, were wont to accept such matters without inquiry or even curiosity, the year 1 became fixed in Christian Churches for ever. When, however, a more lively interest came to be taken in historical facts, it was noticed that the selected year did not conform with the historically fixed dates of (1) the census taken by Quirinius or Cyrenius (see below, p. 94, notes) or of (2) the death of Herod the Great. Hence the date 4 B.C., against the birth stories, in the margin of our Bibles. Other orthodox authorities have dated the Nativity 6 or 7 A.D. to conform with the census. Irenæus and Tertullian had long before placed it in 751 A.U.C., corresponding with our 3 B.C. Orthodox commentators usually maintain that the baptism took place when Jesus was thirty-three years of age, and his death one to three years later. The Old Testament chronology which appears in the margin of our Bibles is the work of Archbishop Ussher, and was first published by him between the years 1650 and 1654.

dioceses put forward an appeal that it should no longer be regarded as an essential part of the creed.[1]

Even if a much earlier date be assigned to the publication of these two Gospels, the argument against the doctrine on the score of lateness is not impaired. No scholar, however orthodox, denies that the Epistles are the earliest Christian documents in our Canon, or that the Epistles contain no reference to the Virgin Birth story, or that the Gospels were not written until at least three-quarters of a century after the date assigned to the birth of Jesus. So even the most conservative confess that the story first appears in two comparatively late documents, and that it is peculiar to these two out of all the other New Testament scriptures. Our "witnesses" are two. As we have already seen, neither of them is a first-hand witness. Let us, however, examine their evidence.

The accounts given of this event by Matthew and by Luke differ in almost every single detail, so it will be more convenient to consider each Gospel separately, except in so far as they have any correspondence. Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus showing his descent—the expected descent of the Messiah who would, according to the literal interpretation of the prophets, resuscitate the ancient glories of Israel as a conquering king—through Solomon and David (by the wife of Uriah the Hittite), and Jacob and Isaac and Abraham.

This genealogy must have been in existence before the Virgin Birth story was thought of, as, if the latter be true, the genealogy is worthless. Unless Joseph was the father of Jesus, there could be no object in tracing the pedigree of Joseph; and if Joseph was the father of Jesus, the Virgin Birth story is not true.

The genealogy begins as "The book of the generation

[1] The scepticism of even the clergy in this matter will be referred to later. See Chapter VII.

of Jesus Christ,"[1] and ends (in its present form) with the words: "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."[2]

Now, if Joseph was only the husband of Mary and not the father of Jesus, the genealogy has no value or meaning as an account of the generation of Jesus; and Jesus is not shown to be "the son of David," as is insisted upon throughout the Gospel. Verse sixteen has evidently been altered to suit the new doctrine of the Virgin Birth; and that this was the case is made all the more certain by the fact that in many old manuscript versions of Matthew it is actually stated that "Joseph begat Jesus."[3]

In what is probably the oldest surviving manuscript version[4] of "the Gospel according to St. Matthew," verse sixteen runs: "Jacob begat Joseph; and Joseph, to whom the Virgin Mary was betrothed, begat Jesus who is called the Christ"—a version which makes the genealogy applicable to Jesus, but which contradicts the virginity of Mary. Moreover, in this Sinaitic Syriac version the words, "to whom the Virgin Mary was betrothed," are undoubtedly an interpolation. The original must have been simply "Joseph begat Jesus," as in the other later manuscripts to which reference has already been made.

Evidently the original genealogy was written when the Virgin Birth story was unknown, and verse sixteen is an attempt to reconcile the older story of a descent from David with the later story of a Virgin Birth. Further evidence that this was the case will appear as we continue our study of the Gospel.

Leaving this question aside for the moment, we will examine the genealogy itself and compare it with the genealogy given in Luke.[5] Including God, who is put down as the father of Adam, Luke specifies seventy-seven

[1] Matthew i, 1. [2] Verse 16.
[3] For list of such manuscripts see "Encyclopædia Biblica," article "Mary," s. 14.
[4] The Sinaitic Palimpsest. [5] Luke iii, 23–38.

names, whereas Matthew, who omits the first twenty-one of these names, specifies only forty-one. Thus the pedigree given by Matthew, even after making allowance for the omission of the pre-Abrahamite ancestors, is fifteen generations shorter than that of Luke.

Matthew, presumably in an attempt to obtain the symmetry of three groups of fourteen generations each, to which he refers in i, 17,[1] misses out some of the names given in the corresponding genealogy in Chronicles,[2] and mentions Rachab (Rahab) as the mother of Booz, thus erroneously connecting as mother and son persons who, according to the Old Testament, lived three hundred years apart from each other.[3]

Still more important is the fact that after the name of David, whose pedigree is in both cases taken from the Old Testament, the two lists differ almost entirely. Between David and Joseph there are only two names common to both lists, Zorobabel and Salathiel; and these, which are taken from the Old Testament genealogies, come nine generations further back in Luke than in Matthew.[4]

It would, indeed, be an extraordinary thing if the carpenter Joseph could trace an unbroken line of descent for about four thousand years back to Adam; but the authors of these two Gospels pretend that they could do so for him, and as—ex hypothesi—they were inspired, both their genealogical trees are correct! How both can be correct and true, when they differ almost entirely in their versions from David downwards, the orthodox have never succeeded in explaining.[5] Both seek to show that

[1] Which is, as a matter of fact, one generation out of its own reckoning.

[2] 1 Chronicles iii.

[3] See "Encyclopædia Biblica," article "Genealogies," and Montefiore's "Synoptic Gospels," vol. ii, p. 452, for commentaries on these tables.

[4] From David to Joseph is twenty-six generations according to Matthew, forty-one according to Luke.

[5] In the middle of the third century Julius Africanus and others attempted by various far-fetched theories to reconcile the differences between the genealogies in Matthew and in Luke, and many theologians since then have renewed the attempts. Recently, however, the orthodox have kept a discreet silence on the subject.

Jesus, *as the son of Joseph*, was descended from David, as it had been foretold that the Messiah would be; yet both subsequently or previously explained that Jesus had no earthly father.

Such minor incongruities as the inadequate number of generations to fit in with Biblical chronology it is unnecessary to deal with, as the genealogies are obviously pure inventions and utterly incompatible with each other or with any possible facts. They are the work of messianic enthusiasts who thought that Jesus was the Messiah, and that the Messiah ought to be descended from David. The requisite genealogy they themselves supplied, as hundreds or thousands of other pedigrees have been supplied, and have passed muster even in the days of colleges of heralds.[1]

After supplying us with the genealogy of Joseph, Matthew gives an account of "the Annunciation." Here again the version of Matthew (i, 18–21) differs entirely from the version of Luke (i, 26–35).

In Matthew it is Joseph who is informed by an angel of the expected miracle, whereas in Luke it is Mary herself who is so informed. Matthew does not tell us how or when Mary heard the news; Luke is equally silent as regards Joseph, who apparently accepts the situation described in chap. ii, 5, without having ever received any explanation of it.

Matthew proceeds to explain that the event which is to take place is the fulfilment of a prophecy in Isaiah (vii, 14) as to a "virgin" who would bring forth a son. This explanation is based upon a mistranslation. Matthew (or rather the pseudo-Matthew) is quoting from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament.[2] In

[1] A curious but unimportant fact is that Matthew mentions four illegitimate births, the mothers being Thamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Luke does not mention the names of any mothers, but gives the names of the sons of all these women except Bathsheba.

[2] If the original Matthew was written in Aramaic, Matthew himself would have quoted the Hebrew and not the Greek.

the original Hebrew the word "almah" is used, and this word means only a "young woman." In the Greek text the word "parthenos" (virgin) is used, but probably only in its metaphorical sense. The original prophecy merely foretold that some young woman would give birth to a son from whom great things might be expected. The Hebrew word for "virgin" is frequently used in the Old Testament, and would, presumably, have been used in this passage of Isaiah if a virgin had really been meant. But the word for "young woman" having actually been used, the misleading translation in the Septuagint cannot give the "prophecy" a new meaning.

Moreover, Isaiah is speaking to Ahaz, and is obviously referring to some event very shortly to take place. Ahaz would hardly be comforted by an assurance that an event, however desirable, would take place about seven hundred and fifty years later. He wants to know whether there is any prospect of his present troubles coming to an end, and Isaiah foretells that a child will shortly be born, and that before it grows up both Syria and Ephraim shall have fallen.[1] The "prophecy" might be considered fulfilled when Ahaz or Isaiah himself had sons born to them—events which took place soon after the interview between them that is recorded in this chapter of Isaiah.[2]

The desire to drag in, however irrelevantly, any Old Testament text which could be looked upon as prophetic is noticeable throughout the New Testament and similar writings of the same period; and this habit of quotation is nowhere more striking than in the stories of the Virgin Birth and of the Crucifixion. Matthew especially is prone to quote "the scriptures" as evidence of the facts which he relates. These quotations are used as arguments for the facts stated, and the inconsequent nature of such arguments must now be apparent to every one.

[1] Or Pekah, the King of Israel, and Rezin, the King of Syria, both of whom he dreaded, would be dead.

[2] See "Encyclopædia Biblica," article "Immanuel."

In those days it was different. The Church Fathers, in their arguments with those who did not believe in the Virgin Birth story, do not adduce evidence about the facts, but quotations from "the prophets" as to what facts should, if the prophets' competence was admitted, be expected. To Jews these "prophecies" were sacred, and, by paralogism, proofs of any event which was said to be a fulfilment of them. When Justin's opponent, imaginary or real, is not convinced by his first arguments, he hurls a few more quotations at him. So too Matthew. Because Isaiah had said "A virgin [?] shall conceive and bear a son," and because some Jews thought that this might refer to the birth of a future Messiah, and because he—the evangelist—is setting out to prove that Jesus was that Messiah, therefore Jesus must have been born of a virgin. That is his argument.

It would be unseemly to ridicule those who accepted such quotations for arguments. Paralogisms are too often, even to-day, accepted for syllogisms. But it is necessary to notice that such fallacious substitutes for logic were, for many centuries, the chief stock-in-trade of theologians, and even of those theologians who, in other respects, were astute and skilful dialecticians. Then we shall be able to understand how it was that the writers of the introductory chapters of Matthew and Luke told two entirely different stories about the same alleged event.

Their evidence, in both cases, consisted of "prophecies." So that it might be fulfilled which was written by some ancient author, Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Egypt had to play their respective parts in the story. Each editor had the same evidence—the ancient Jewish scriptures of the last seven centuries or more—and each used that evidence as he thought best.

The really remarkable thing is that later generations should accept two entirely conflicting sets of evidences as both being correct.

In chapter ii Matthew goes on to relate how Herod the

King sends for the chief priests and the scribes—the very people who live in hopes of the advent of a Messiah who will deliver them from the rule of foreigners and of kings selected by foreigners—and asks them where their deliverer is, according to the prophets, to be born; and they, in their innocence of heart, tell him where his future rival ought to be found.

Luke knows nothing of all this, nor of the "slaughter of the innocents," which Matthew next tells of. Neither does Josephus, the great Jewish historian who lived so soon after this time, and who wrote at such great length about Herod's reign, make any mention of this murder of all children of two years old and under. No historian appears ever to have heard of this wholesale massacre, though it would hardly have escaped notice if it really took place. Later on we will consider some of the numerous parallels to this story, and note how in a very large number of mythologies the divine hero narrowly escapes from such an attempt on the part of a king to destroy his predestined rival. For the present we will content ourselves with continuing to examine Matthew's story.

Matthew goes on to relate how the holy family flee to Egypt, a journey unknown to Luke, and how, when Herod the Great dies, Joseph fears to return to Judæa because Archelaus, a son of Herod the Great, was "king" of that country[1] ("did reign in Judæa" in Authorized Version).

[1] He was really ethnarch, not king, as stated in the Greek MSS. There were about this time several Herods, and the reader of the Gospel stories is, at first, apt to confuse them, or at any rate not always clearly to distinguish them. The ones with which we are chiefly concerned are:—

(1) Herod the Great, who reigned with the title of King, but under the "protection" of Rome, over Judæa from 39 B.C. and over all Palestine from 30 B.C. His father, Antipater, had been made Governor of Cœle-Syria by the Romans, and Herod himself had been a governor and a tetrarch before he became king. He was an unscrupulous man, who in 29 B.C. deserted his patron Marc Antony and took the part of Octavian, and thus "played his cards well." He died in 4 B.C., and was succeeded by:—

(2) A son Archelaus, who inherited only part of his father's possessions,

Yet he goes to Galilee, which was ruled over by Antipas, another son of Herod's, because the prophecy, "He shall be called a Nazarene," had to be fulfilled.[1]

With this episode ends the second chapter of Matthew and all reference to a Virgin Birth. In chapter iii the story starts again with an account like Mark's of Jesus becoming the Christ by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at his baptism. From this point onward we hear nothing of the miraculous birth, but much, as we shall see later, that is quite irreconcilable with it. The first two chapters of Matthew are an addition to a story which would be complete without them, and which is inconsistent with them.

If we now turn to the Gospel according to St. Luke, we find a totally different story of this Virgin Birth. Luke piles wonder upon wonder.

First the angel Gabriel, who usually stands in the

and ruled over Judæa and Samaria, as ethnarch, until 6 A.D., when he was succeeded by a Roman procurator.

(3) Another son, Antipas, who inherited Galilee, which he ruled over as tetrarch till 39 A.D.

(4) And another son, Philip, who ruled from Cæsarea Philippi over a small territory E. and N.E. of the sea of Galilee, until his death in 34 A.D.

(5) Agrippa, a son of Aristobulus, and grandson of Herod the Great, was a friend of the Roman Emperor Caligula, and received from him in 37 A.D. the territory which had formerly been ruled over by his uncle Philip. In 41 A.D. he became, under the suzerainty of Rome, King of Judæa and Samaria. This Agrippa was the brother of Herodias, the wife of another son (erroneously called Philip in our Canonical Gospels—Matthew xiv, 3, Mark vi, 17, Luke iii, 19) of Herod the Great. Philip, the ruler of Cæsarea Philippi, was certainly not the husband of Herodias. Some of the oldest manuscript versions of Matthew do not give the name Philip; none of the oldest versions of Luke give it. It is doubtful if the original Mark gave it. The name must have crept in some time after the history of the Herod family had been forgotten.

All these persons were sometimes called Herod, with or without their further names or distinguishing titles. Hence the confusion which has often arisen.

[1] As a matter of fact, the prophecies referred to both relate to Nazarites, not to Nazarenes. The prophets spoke of men who eschewed strong drink and never had their hair cut. They certainly did not refer to an inhabitant of a place called Nazareth. The confusion arose in consequence of the similarity between the two words, and there is still much obscurity as to the real meaning of some of the words translated "Nazarite" or "Nazarene" in our Bibles.

presence of God (verse 19), appears to Zacharias and announces that his wife Elizabeth, though, like Sarah, hitherto barren and now stricken in years, will give birth to a son, and that Zacharias himself will be struck dumb for venturing to doubt that this wonder will come to pass. Then follows the annunciation to Mary that she will give miraculous birth to a son, who will be given "the throne of his father David," and will "reign over the house of Jacob for ever."[1]

Then the miraculous foreknowledge of Elizabeth, and of her unborn babe, about Mary's great destiny.

Then the beautiful magnificat, certainly a remarkable literary production if really the words of Mary.

Then Zacharias' recovery of his voice and the miraculous naming of the child John (the Baptist), and another beautiful literary production, the Benedictus, curiously resembling in style the outpouring of Mary recorded a few verses earlier.[2] Then the story of the census, the announcement to the shepherds, the angel, and the multitude of the heavenly host; to all of which we shall refer later.

Then the miraculous recognition of "the Lord's Christ" by Simeon, who, again in the same literary style as Zacharias and Mary, speaks the Nunc Dimittis, another beautiful little poem.

Finally another miraculous recognition, this time by the "prophetess Anna"; and then the anecdote about the child Jesus' precocity in the temple.

After that chapter iii begins, and the story makes a fresh start—at the same moment in the life of Jesus as that in Mark—with John the Baptist's preaching in the wilderness and the baptism of Jesus.

[1] It is again Gabriel who makes this announcement. This Archangel was identified by many with the Holy Spirit (see Charles's "Ascension of Isaiah," footnotes on pp. 19 and 20). He might, therefore, be regarded as the father of the child whose birth he thus announces.

[2] Curious only if the speakers were two different persons; natural if the two canticles are the work of the same author.

So in Luke, as in Matthew, it is the first two chapters alone which mention the Virgin Birth. But, as Luke's account of that event differs so widely from Matthew's that both cannot be correct, let us examine it more closely, so as to see whether it be the more or the less credible of the two. Some of Luke's statements have already been referred to while we were examining Matthew's account. Of the others the first which we need notice is verse 32 of chapter i. The angel here states that Jesus will be given "the throne of his father David."[1] Now, it is only through Joseph that Jesus is said to be descended from David, so this statement of the angel is inconsistent with the Virgin Birth story. Why, moreover, should the betrothed Mary ask the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"? Nothing has been said about any immediate birth: she has only been told that at some future date she will give birth to a son who will become a great personage. The natural conclusion to which she would come would be that this son, with the great destiny in store for him, would be the fruit of her approaching union with Joseph. There is no apparent reason for her question. It seems to be introduced merely for the sake of the answer, and to give an opportunity definitely to state the virginity, and to infer that the physical process of generation was carried out by God. Otherwise the overshadowing by the power of the Highest might be taken metaphorically, and the story thought to differ from that in Mark only in the fact that the Holy Spirit entered into Jesus before, instead of after, birth. This interpretation would be all the more likely, as the Holy Spirit was generally regarded as feminine.[2] Luke is here

[1] That Jesus never did receive the throne of David shows that the angel was, at any rate, not a reliable prophet; but we are not at present concerned with this.

[2] Origen quotes a passage from the Gospel of the Hebrews in which Jesus is reported as speaking of "my mother the Holy Spirit," and apparently there was at one time a sect of Christians who somehow connected his birth with Joseph and a female Holy Ghost!

emphasizing the doctrine that the divinity of Jesus was obtained physically and not spiritually.

In chapter ii we come to what should be, from the point of view of chronology, one of the most important texts in the Gospel. It collates the birth of Jesus with a census[1] of the people taken by Quirinius, Governor of Syria—the Cyrenius of our Bibles.

According to Matthew, the parents of Jesus go on a journey so as to avoid a massacre of young children; according to Luke, they go on a journey so as to conform with the regulations for a census.

Now, the only census to which this can refer[2] took place in 6 or 7 A.D., and we have already heard in chapter i that the birth of Jesus was announced to Mary during the reign of Herod the Great, who died in 4 B.C.

According to Matthew, the death of Herod was announced to Joseph some time after he had arrived

[1] "Taxing" in the Authorized Version of our Bibles. By taxing we should understand enrolment or a census, as no such method of taxation as is here implied was employed by the Romans. But the Jews were not perhaps the first, and certainly not the last, to stigmatize an unpopular governmental action by the name of a tax. Modern newspapers have not scrupled to attach the same obnoxious name to policies, quite unconnected with taxation, entered upon by parties to whom they are hostile.

[2] There had been other Roman censuses, in 26 B.C. and in 6 B.C.; but in those days Judæa was a protectorate, and not subject to Roman censuses; moreover, Quirinius was not then Governor of Syria. In 6 A.D. Judæa came under the direct rule of Rome, and at the end of that year or the beginning of 7 A.D. a Roman census was actually taken in Judæa, giving rise to serious tumults, in which a Galilean named Judas took a leading part. The memory of these disturbances and of their suppression was probably burnt deep into the recollection of the Jews; and, with the careless disregard of chronology which distinguishes many of the writers of antiquity, the author of this chapter of Luke connects these tragic days with the reign of Herod the Great. Apart too from chronology, our author has fallen into other errors. Galilee being a protectorate and not under the direct rule of Rome, its inhabitants would not have to be enrolled in the census taken in Judæa. In no Roman census—and it was only the Romans who took censuses of the people, since the Jews thought it wrong to do so—did families have to leave their places of residence and go to the district of their respective tribes. And that Joseph should, on such an occasion, be accompanied by his betrothed wife (for such is the meaning of the Greek word translated in our Bibles as "espoused") is also incredible to any one acquainted with Oriental ideas and customs.

with the infant Jesus in Egypt. How long after they first arrived we are not told; but, according to this account, Jesus must have been born in the year 5 B.C. at the latest, and probably earlier.

According to the first chapter of Luke, Jesus must have been born in 3 B.C. at the very latest; according to the second chapter, in 6 A.D. at the very earliest. The interval of about ten years, or even a great deal more, cannot be bridged by any explanation. Either one account or the other is wrong, or both are wrong. Both chapters cannot possibly be correct.

Only for the purpose of the story—so that a Galilean should be born at Bethlehem, and thus three distinct and contradictory prophecies [1] be fulfilled at once—had the parents of Jesus to leave their native home in semi-independent Galilee and travel to Bethlehem in Judæa to be numbered. Such a journey would really be no more necessary than it is now for an English-born Canadian to return to the home of his ancestors whenever a census is taken in England. Joseph would have been under no compulsion, legal or moral, to undertake the journey, and still less so would his future wife in a country and at a time when women counted for nothing. The census was believed to be taken for purposes of taxation (whence the word "tax" in the Gospel), and would therefore be unlikely to attract those who were not compelled to attend.

Returning once more to the question of chronology, we find at the beginning of chapter iii another date-mark which only makes confusion worse confounded. "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius" (verse 1) "Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age" (verse 23).

Now, the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius was

[1] That the Messiah should be born at Bethlehem of David's line, that a Virgin should give birth to the Messiah, and that the Messiah should be a Galilean.

28–29 A.D.;[1] so, according to this chapter, Jesus was born about 2–1 B.C. However, in view of the word translated "about," we need not lay too much stress upon this. The thirty years of age is apparently specified so as to indicate that Jesus had reached an adult age from the Jewish legal and canonical point of view.

The chronological discrepancies of Luke, and in a less degree the absence of definite chronology in Matthew, are principally of importance as showing the vagueness of tradition at the time when our Canonical Gospels were compiled and the impossibility of both such contradictory accounts being inspired or true.

The only explanation of all these contradictions is that the stories were written, long after the events had taken place or were supposed to have taken place, by men who were unacquainted at first-hand with the history of the times, and even at third- or fourth-hand not very well informed about them, and who therefore confused together several members of the Herod family, misdated the census, misunderstood its locality, and made various other mistakes.

It is remarkable that, after all these details about the events surrounding the birth and a brief account of one episode in childhood,[2] no further information is supplied about the life of Jesus until he is about thirty years of age.

Luke in his third chapter, like Matthew in his, passes on to the baptism, which formed the starting-point of the original Gospel—that of Mark. After this one episode in Jerusalem (to which we shall refer later) there is an absolute blank, and then the story begins again with an episode which fits in well with Mark's story, or

[1] In the margin of our Bibles is put 26 A.D., apparently so as to make the thirty years of age count from 4 B.C. The date is not necessarily incompatible with any of the other dates indicated, the "about" making it sufficiently vague to suit all of them. But we are not helped by it, and are only confused by taking it as an exact date.

[2] Given by Luke only (ii, 40–52).

with the remainder of Luke's own story, but which joins on very badly to the Virgin Birth story which precedes it.

At the baptism a voice from heaven proclaims, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased"; thus paraphrasing the words of Psalm ii, 7, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." The paraphrase, which is the work of some late editor,[1] was necessitated by the Virgin Birth story. Originally this chapter of Luke taught, as Mark teaches, that Jesus became the divine Son by the descent of the Holy Spirit into him. Eventually the text was altered so as to conform, as far as possible, with the Virgin Birth story. "This day have I begotten thee" became "In thee I am well pleased."

The original words are, however, still to be found in the Acts (xiii, 33) and in the Epistles (Hebrews i, 5). In the former they are connected apparently with the Resurrection, by which, according to many primitive Christians, Jesus became Christ; in the latter they are used as an explanation of God's promise: "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a son." The same words are again quoted by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in v, 5.

The idea of God metaphorically begetting a son by inspiring a man at his baptism is, it is hardly necessary to add, totally distinct from the idea of God physically begetting a son from a human mother. But the editors who attempted to bring the Gospel into conformity with its first two (new) chapters could not, it appears, harden their hearts sufficiently to eliminate the last sixteen verses of the third chapter; and so we now come to Luke's genealogy, and find it preceded by the curious "being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph."[2] Evidently the "as

[1] Until the fourth century the words, "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee," were used in orthodox churches. The original Luke must have contained them. See article "Nativity," s. 14, col. 3348, in "Encyclopædia Biblica."

[2] Verse 23.

was supposed" is an interpolation, as the whole genealogy is without any bearing on the story unless it is that of Jesus through his father Joseph.

The genealogy differs in several respects from that given in Matthew. Of the differences, the most important is that by Luke the descent is traced through David's son Nathan instead of through his son Solomon, as it is by Matthew, and that consequently from that point downwards the pedigrees differ in all the names but two—Salathiel and Zorobabel—which are (in such lists unaccountably) the same. The father of Joseph and seventeen more of his predecessors before we reach Zorobabel in Luke differ every one of them in name from the father of Joseph and the eight other predecessors before we reach Zorobabel in Matthew.[1] Both authors agree that Salathiel was the father of Zorobabel, but they differ in the name given to the former's father and in the names given to all his ancestors until David is reached. From David to Abraham the lists agree. Then Matthew ceases, but Luke continues up to "Adam, which was the son of God," following, with but one small slip, the lists given in 1 Chronicles i, 1–4 and 24–27.

But the disagreement between Matthew and Luke about the names of the ancestors of Jesus, noteworthy though it is as showing that these evangelists could not both have been inspired or even well informed, is not so important as the mere fact that the genealogy of Joseph is given in spite of the assertion in the first chapter that Joseph was not the father of Jesus. We are evidently dealing with an earlier tradition, which the editor of the later Gospel is loth to part with, even when the Virgin Birth story has been added.

[1] It is not a question of one evangelist tracing through a female line and the other through a male line. It is a question of assigning different fathers to the same man, and it is certainly impossible for a man to have more than one father. It is not the length of the disagreements which is of importance, but that the names immediately preceding an agreement are impossible to explain.

That the earliest edition of Luke did not contain the Virgin Birth story is now admitted by most commentators. The Gospel according to St. Luke, which Marcion used, began—like Mark's—with the baptism of Jesus. It did not contain anything about the birth of Jesus. Irenæus[1] complains that Marcion "mutilated the Gospel according to Luke, taking away all that is recorded of the generation of the Lord, and many parts of his discourses in which he recognizes the Creator of the Universe as his Father"; but Justin Martyr, though he made a fierce attack upon Marcion, does not refer to any such mutilations, and seems to have himself been ignorant of any Gospel according to St. Luke.

Now, Marcion—afterwards branded as a heretic—was the leader, even on the admission of the "orthodox" Tertullian (150–220) himself, of a very large proportion of the Christians of his day, and for two hundred years more Marcionites were the closest rivals of the sect which was subsequently called Catholic.

Marcion and Justin Martyr were contemporaries, flourishing in the first half of the second century, and Irenæus lived in the second half of the second century, so it appears highly probable that the Gospel used by Marcion formed the foundation of the Gospel afterwards known as "according to St. Luke." Instead of Marcion excising passages from Luke, it was the redactor of Luke who added passages to the Gospel used by Marcion. This is the conclusion at which many commentators have arrived, though others still dispute it. We need not here further consider the arguments about that, but only note that the Marcionites rejected the early chapters of Luke, if indeed they had ever heard of them. And not only the Marcionites, but other sects of Christians[2]—afterwards to be classed as heretics—had likewise never heard of this story of Luke's, or repu-

[1] Book I, chapter xxvii, section 2.
[2] E.g., the Ebionites, Cerdonites, and all the Gnostics.

diated it as a fiction when they did, saying that it was full of errors and self-contradictions. And, similarly, many men, even in later days, who accepted the Gospel of St. Matthew as "Holy Scripture," repudiated the first two chapters, and believed that the man Jesus became Christ by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at his baptism. The first two chapters were regarded as evidently late additions to the original text, which began, as Mark also did, with the baptism of Jesus, the old Gnostic explanation of his Christhood. Epiphanius records that the Matthew Gospel used by the Ebionites had not got the first two chapters. He also wrote about Cerinthus, a Christian author of the early second century, who had taught that "at the baptism God caused a real divine force which is named Christ to descend upon Jesus of Nazereth, the son of Joseph and Mary."

Justin, in the middle of the second century, and other early Fathers of the Catholic Church, continually refer to those Christians who deny the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, who believed that Jesus was a man and not a god, who use versions of Matthew which state that "Joseph begat Jesus,"[1] and who repudiate the Virgin Birth story as an after-thought of the Gospel editors.

In connection with the genealogies given by Matthew and Luke, it is worth noting that Justin Martyr, who wrote—apparently in ignorance of our Canonical Gospels—in the middle of the second century, also gives a pedigree of Jesus, but traces it through Mary and not through Joseph, and thus makes his genealogy compatible with the story of the Virgin Birth, which, however, he relates differently from both the stories in our Gospels.[2] Other Gospels, now classed as apocryphal, do the same.

[1] See "Ency. Biblica," article "Mary," s. 15 column 2,963
" " " " " s. 21 (e) " 2,968
" " " " "Nativity," s. 5 " 3,343
" " " " "Gospels," s. 22 (a), note 4 " 1,779

[2] "Dialogue with Trypho," First Apology.

We are therefore faced with the choice of discarding the Canonical Gospels and accepting the apocryphal works which give a story that at any rate does not in this respect contradict itself, or of accepting a self-contradictory story from the recognized Gospels, or of discarding all the stories of the Virgin Birth and not believing that this stupendous miracle ever took place.

The evolution of the Virgin Birth story from the earlier Gnostic story of the inspiration by Jesus of the Christ spirit at his baptism may be traced in the now apocryphal, but then accepted, Gospels. At first we find the episode of the baptism by John much as it is described by Mark; but, instead of the voice from heaven saying "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," it says "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." That is to say, that by the descent of the "Spirit like a dove" upon him he becomes the spiritual Son of God; that he was not born the Son of God, but only became so metaphorically on "this day" when the Christ spirit descended upon him.

The "this day I have begotten thee" is the older version, to be found in "The Memoirs of the Apostles" and in various other works founded perhaps upon these "memoirs." It is of course a quotation from Psalm ii, 7, and was therefore probably introduced into the narrative, like so much else, in order to show that a "prophecy" had been fulfilled. The birth stories are full of such episodes and sayings introduced for that purpose. Many of the Apocryphal Gospels state that the birth took place in a cave, as that would, the authors attempted to show, be a fulfilment of certain Old Testament prophecies. Every manner of permutation and combination of Nazareth and Bethlehem as Joseph's permanent home or temporary dwelling place is tried in different Gospels, so as to show that the Messianic prophecies had been fulfilled.

This necessity for proving that the prophecies had been

fulfilled is naively confessed by Justin Martyr in his "Dialogue with Trypho." The latter is supposed to ask why it was necessary, if Jesus was already the Son of God, that he should again receive the Holy Spirit at his baptism, to which Justin replies that it was only necessary because the prophecies must be fulfilled.

At the time when this dialogue was written—about the middle of the second century—the Gnostics and other Christians were disputing the new theory of the divine birth, and maintaining that Jesus was a man born like other men, but imbued, at his baptism, with the divine spirit.

The next step was, apparently, to quote both versions of the words spoken from heaven, as is done in the Gospel according to the Hebrews; and finally the present canonical version of the episode was written and retained by the increasingly powerful sect which was afterwards to call itself Catholic.

Thus the story is evolved. At first a story about a follower of John the Baptist who becomes a great teacher, imbued with religious genius; then an episode added of a human voice which proceeds from God announcing that this teacher is divinely endowed; then the complete story, in various versions, of a divine birth. As the (subsequently) Catholic sect becomes all-powerful, the older narratives are discarded and classed as apocryphal, and the narratives which give support to the "orthodox" doctrine are accepted as canonical. The former are, as far as possible, suppressed; the latter encouraged and copied and edited for the purpose of making the doctrine known to all Christians.

If we take the Canonical Gospels as a guide to the time when the Virgin Birth story was first introduced into the history of Jesus, and the evidence of the "Fathers of the Church," who first mention them, for the dates of these Gospels, we are justified in stating that the Virgin Birth

doctrine was certainly unknown until the middle of the first half of the second century at the very earliest, and probably until considerably later than that. As we have already seen, Marcion, the founder (according to the Catholics of later days) of the Marcionite heresy, the upholder (according to himself) of the pure primitive faith, rejected the Virgin Birth story, or had never even heard of it. His doctrine was that Jesus was a pre-existent spiritual being devoid of any human nature except in appearance. That was one second-century Christian doctrine.

According to the Clementine Homilies (and Clement is regarded as a "Father"), St. Peter is said to have affirmed that Jesus never claimed to be God, and to have argued that "the begotten cannot be compared with that which is unbegotten or self-begotten." This apparently is an expression of the point of view of the Ebionites, one of the oldest sects, if not indeed actually the very oldest sect, of Christians. That Jesus was neither miraculously born nor a god was another second-century Christian doctrine.

Justin Martyr, writing in the middle of the second century, about the same time as or just after our Canonical Gospels were first published, himself admits that many Christians did not believe in the supernatural birth of Jesus. Although he himself believes in the divine birth, and although he classes as heretics many sects of Christians whose orthodoxy as regards "eating meats sacrificed to idols," insistence upon the observance of the law, and other kindred matters, is suspect, he does not so class those who believe in the normal and natural generation of Jesus. Indeed, he was quite ready to compromise with those who regarded Jesus as a man and not a god, and with those who regarded him as a spiritual being never clothed in flesh, and ready too to adapt his argument to Pagan ideas. In his apologia he writes :—

> But when we say that the Word (Logos), which is the first begetting of God, was begotten without intercourse—

> Jesus Christ, our Master—.....we bring forward no new thing beyond those known among you who are called sons of Zeus.

He then refers to Hermes, the Logos of the Gnostics, and to Asclepius the healer, both sons of the most high God, and proceeds:—

> But as to the Son of God called Jesus—even though he were only a man born in the common way, yet because of his wisdom is he worthy to be called Son of God; for all writers call God "Father of men and gods." And if we say further that he was also in a special way, beyond his common birth, begotten of God as Word (Logos) of God, let us have this in common with you who call Hermes the Word (Logos) who brings tidings from God.[1]

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth was evidently still an open question among even that sect of Christians which was afterwards called "orthodox." It certainly so remained up till at least the end of the second century, and even at the beginning of the fourth century it was, apparently, not considered seriously heretical to deny it.[2]

It is hardly surprising that the Jews, among whom the primitive form of Christianity arose, abjured the Catholic form of that religion, and either remained Gnostics or Ebionites until those faiths were suppressed as heresies, or reverted to Judaism. By the time when Christianity arose the better-educated Jews had arrived at a higher conception of the Supreme God than that portrayed in the anthropomorphic tales of the Old Testament, and the idea of a physical generation by that spiritual being appeared to them not only blasphemous, but absurd.[3] To the pagans of Asia Minor, on the other

[1] Translation taken from Mead, "Thrice-Greatest Hermes," vol. iii, pp. 217–18. It must be remembered that by the Church Fathers it was believed that Hermes, Asclepius, Dionysus, and all the other gods of that type had originally been men, deified by their worshippers—great teachers whom enthusiastic followers had, after their deaths, called gods.

[2] See Chapter VII.

[3] Some Hellenized Jews, who transferred pagan ideas to their own national history and believed in the divine births of Isaac and of Samuel and in miraculous conceptions by Zipporah, Leah, and Tamar, formed an exception to this rule. A few of them apparently believed that Moses was born of a virgin.

hand, the idea of the virgin birth of a man-god was—as we shall soon see—familiar, plausible, and even necessary; and it was among these Gentile Christians of the unphilosophic classes that the doctrine, which was afterwards incorporated in Christianity, first arose.

The earliest and by far the largest of the Jewish sects of Christians was the Ebionite, and the Ebionites rejected the Virgin Birth story and laid great stress upon the descent of Jesus from David through his father Joseph. Jesus they regarded as a man, and only divine in so far as he was imbued with the Christ spirit, an emanation from God.

The more closely we examine these two Gospels of Matthew and Luke the more surprising it appears, not that the Virgin Birth story was rejected by so many sects of early Christians, but that it was ever accepted by any of them. After the first two chapters in each of them, there is never a single word[1] of reference to this proof of the divinity of Jesus, and there are many passages which cannot possibly be reconciled with the birth story.

The contradictions involved in a story which frequently refers to Joseph as the father of Jesus, and yet begins by the Virgin Birth episode, can be accounted for only by assuming that the original Gospels did not contain the earlier chapters of our present Gospels, and that when these chapters were added the editors omitted to make all the alterations in the text of the original chapters which would be necessary to bring these into accordance with the new commencement. Some small modifications seem indeed to have been made, but much remains which is absolutely inconsistent with the Virgin Birth story.

According to Mark (chapter iii), Jesus is believed by "his friends"[2] to be mad—"He is beside himself"

[1] If we eliminate the admitted interpolation, placed as a parenthesis even in our Authorized Version, "(as was supposed)," in verse 23 of Luke iii.

[2] More properly translated "kinsmen," as shown in the margin of our Authorized Version.

(verse 21); and those friends, we learn from verse 31, included "his brethren and his mother." If he were regarded as a prophet or religious reformer, there would be nothing surprising about this, the usual fate of reformers; but his mother, if he were miraculously born, could hardly have believed him to be mad. Matthew, having introduced the Virgin Birth story, tones down this, "He is beside himself," to "all the people were amazed" (xii, 23); and Luke, in our versions, altogether omits the incident.

Mark (vi, 4), "A prophet is not without honour but .....among his own kin....," is also altered by Matthew (xiii, 57), who quotes the same words with the omission of "among his own kin," and by Luke, who in our versions quotes only the first part of the saying. In these passages, therefore, the original Matthew and the original Luke may have been modified. In others the alterations are more certain still. In several old manuscript versions of Luke ii, 5,[1] we find the reading, "to be taxed with Mary his wife"; the word "espoused" being omitted.[2]

The original form of the words given in our Authorized Version as "Joseph and his mother" (Luke ii, 43) is "his parents." In verse 48 the words, "thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing," remain unaltered. These passages show that the chapter was written before the doctrine of the Virgin Birth had been added to the story. In the former case "his parents" is altered to "Joseph and his mother"; in the latter, Joseph is still referred to as the father of Jesus. The editing was not efficiently done. Even the words "the parents" are retained in verse 27; and in verse 33 it is said that "Joseph[3] and

[1] The second chapter of Luke shows signs of having originally been written before the Virgin Birth story was formulated, and of attempted alterations for the purpose of making it conform with the first chapter. As we have stated before, it is from the third chapter onwards that we find the oldest and the unaltered Luke.

[2] See "Encyc. Biblica," article "Mary," 5 (c); also article "Nativity."

[3] "His father and his mother" in the original.

his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him." Though the name "Joseph" has been substituted for "his father," the episode—incompatible with the Virgin Birth story though it is—has been retained.

When Jesus, metaphorically or literally, claims to have been about his Father's business, Joseph and Mary "understood not the saying" (verses 49, 50). According to both Matthew and Luke, Mary the Virgin knows that her son Jesus is a supernaturally-born god. It is not pretended that, in her innocence, she regarded parthenogenesis as normal. And, apart from that natural knowledge that the birth was miraculous, there was the Annunciation—to Mary herself according to Luke, though to Joseph according to Matthew—and other events so remarkable that "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."[1]

Neither she nor Joseph could readily forget or minimize the miracle if it occurred as related; yet, according to both Matthew and Luke, Joseph and Mary regard Jesus, after his birth, as an ordinary though very precocious child, treat him throughout his life as an ordinary man, and "marvel" whenever he in any way distinguishes himself above his fellows. The whole of the remainder of these Gospels is inconsistent, in this respect, with the stories of the Virgin Birth as related in their early chapters.

Matthew's and Luke's first chapters show how John the Baptist himself and the respective mothers of John and of Jesus recognize from the beginning that the latter is the Messiah. Yet in Matthew xi, 2, 3, and in the corresponding Luke vii, 19–20, we read how John was still doubtful as to the divinity and Messiahship of Jesus.

When Jesus preaches "in his own country," and his listeners say "Is not this the carpenter's son?"[2] neither his relatives nor his disciples deny the fact.

[1] Luke ii, 19. [2] Matthew xiii, 55.

According to John (vii, 5), his immediate relatives did not believe in him.[1] Is it credible that their mother Mary, who, according to Matthew and to Luke, must have known that he was divinely born, would bring up her other children in ignorance of the divine nature of their brother? Is it credible that she herself should forget all about these wonderful events, and join a party who attempted to "lay hold on him" because they think that "he is beside himself"? Is it not clear that the Virgin Birth story was subsequently added to a story which had had no such beginning—a story in which the divinity of Jesus was not said to be suspected until after his death?

Many even of the orthodox critics acknowledge that the early chapters of the Gospel according to St. Luke must have been added long after the Gospel was first written.[2] These, then, if they still maintain the truth of the Virgin Birth story, must rely upon Matthew alone—one solitary record of such a miraculous event out of all the writings in our New Testaments, and one, moreover, just as open to suspicion of being a late addition as Luke's itself.

Is it surprising that some of them reject both stories, and privately confess that there is no adequate reason for believing that this stupendous miracle ever occurred?

[1] "For neither did his brethren believe in him."

[2] See, for example, "Some New Testament Problems," by the Rev. Arthur Wright, who rejects as late additions all of the first two chapters of St. Luke and all that part of the third chapter which details a genealogy of Jesus. This, of course, brings Luke into line with Mark, and makes his story begin with the descent of the spirit of Christianity in the form of a dove on to the head of the already grown-up Jesus.

Chapter II

THE POSSIBILITY AND IMPROBABILITY OF A VIRGIN BIRTH

It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the truth or falsity of this doctrine is a matter to be decided by evidence. We are concerned with an inquiry into the nature of the evidence brought forward in support of it, into the reliability of the witnesses, and into the consistency of their respective stories.

It is frequently asserted that the occurrence of miracles is denied by sceptics merely because they are contrary to the normal course of nature as observed and recorded by scientists, and that the only argument of doubters of the Virgin Birth stories is that, since no other virgin births have been authenticated, they are therefore impossible. This is not really the argument used by men of scientific and logical mental habits, as it is an argument which assumes the very matter at issue—namely, the impossibility of miracles. Moreover, a human virgin birth, though primâ facie impossible, is not inconceivable.

Cases of virgin birth are well known to occur in certain circumstances and among certain species. For two or three or even more generations the Aphides normally produce their young parthenogenetically. The common green fly on our rose bushes, and other species of plant lice, are well-known examples of this procedure. Twenty parthenogenetic generations, before males are produced to share in the reproductive process, are quite common under natural conditions, and experimentally a very much larger number of asexual generations have been made to follow each other.

Certain species of fresh-water shrimps also produce

their young parthenogenetically, in some cases for many years, before there comes a sexually produced generation.

Experiments have been made which show that unfertilized eggs of a frog can be caused by mechanical means to develop into tadpoles, and thence, in the usual way, into frogs; and the unfertilized eggs of sea urchins have also been caused, by chemical treatment, to develop into living and normal urchins.

In some kinds of plants, and in the lowest forms of animal life, reproduction is often asexual, and brought about by division or by some small part of the parent breaking off and forming a new plant or animal; and there are, as is well known to every naturalist, large classes of animals, as well as of plants, which are self-fertilizing hermaphrodites.

But these peculiarities, which are subject to fairly well-known laws, are limited to very few and comparatively lowly organized species. Parthenogenesis is unknown among mammals, and the only supposed cases of its occurrence among human beings are those believed in by the adherents of various religions. To some of these supposed cases, which are very numerous, we shall shortly refer. No one to-day will be prepared—probably no one at any time would have been prepared—to believe that all of them really occurred. Even the most credulous believe in only one of them, and that not upon evidence of its actual occurrence, but because they have always, from their youth up, heard that one story pass without criticism.

In other words, no one, whether scientific or superstitious by temperament or upbringing, denies the absolute possibility of a human virgin birth; but every one, whether scientific or superstitious, thinks such an event so nearly impossible as to require unexceptionable evidence before a report of its occurrence can be credited. The superstitious accept as evidence the hearsay of their childhood, and believe in one story. Though that belief entails

the belief that one virgin birth has been possible, they believe that any other is impossible: they believe in a miracle. The sceptic, on the other hand, having learnt that so many other similar stories are supported by the same kind of hearsay, demands, before he will credit any of them, some good historical evidence of their actual occurrence.

He does not assert that they are absolutely impossible, but only that they are so very exceedingly improbable, and that they have been so frequently before accepted as true, without any trustworthy evidence whatever of their truth, by the adherents of various religions, that the evidence brought forward in their behalf cannot be accepted without some sort of inquiry into its reliability.

It is not the primâ facie incredibility, but the lack of evidence, which forms the stumbling-block to his belief.

We have examined the evidence (for the Virgin Birth doctrine) of the first two chapters of those books, written by unknown authors at unknown dates, called the "Gospels according to" Matthew and Luke respectively; and we have briefly referred to the evidence (against the Virgin Birth doctrine) of all the other New Testament writers. We have shown how the two witnesses "for" contradict each other and themselves in almost every particular. If we come to the conclusion that the weight of evidence is against the Virgin Birth story, we must class that story as equally mythical with all the other miraculous birth stories which we will now consider.[1]

Further Note on Miracles.

We ought, when considering miracles, to draw a distinction between a miracle which is an infringement of

[1] The two stories of Matthew and Luke will be again referred to (see Chapter VI). A consideration of the minor details of the stories—the Massacre of the Innocents, the birth in a stable, the cradling in a manger, the journey for the purpose of "taxation"—must be deferred for the present, as their value as evidence will be better appreciated after we have noticed the origin of many similar stories.

the laws of nature and one which involves a contradiction in terms—between a reported occurrence which is contrary to experience and one which is a real physical impossibility. It is primâ facie impossible that the laws of nature should be broken, but it is credible that they should be broken by a Being who designed them; and it is, in some cases, not at all unlikely that our experience is at fault, and that therefore we are mistaken as to what some particular law of nature really is.[1] If, then, such a miraculous event is reported, we are at first incredulous, but open to conviction. We ask for evidence, and are prepared, if the evidence is reliable, to believe that the unusual event occurred. But the evidence must be really reliable.

Miracles of the other class are not only primâ facie impossible, but also incredible, as they are, to begin with, self-contradictory. No miracle can make $2 + 2 = 5$, because we are dealing with defined abstract terms, and to alter the meaning of such terms is not a miracle, but a misstatement.

The report that a man or a god had picked up a rainbow and put it in his pocket would be incredible because such an act is a real physical impossibility, the word "rainbow" referring to an optical illusion, and not to a concrete thing capable of being handled.

(This example is chosen because it should excite no religious prejudices, no such miracle having been reported in any story. There are, however, other miracles actually reported which are just as much open to objection, as real impossibilities which could have been reported only by ignorant men.)

Considerations of space preclude a full discussion of miracles in general, but this distinction should be borne in mind. The miracle at present being discussed is not rejected out of hand as a physical impossibility, though

[1] "The Laws of Nature" being the term we use to denote the invariable sequence of events as observed by ourselves and recorded by other observers believed to be competent to judge.

that is what is usually done when pagan stories of the same kind are being considered; but the evidence for its occurrence and the reliability of the witnesses are being examined.

We are prepared to consider evidence that an exception to the—apparently invariable—rule has occurred; but we are not prepared to believe that such an exception has occurred merely on the strength of a few passages in two books written at unknown dates by unknown authors —passages, moreover, contradicted by their approximate contemporaries and contradicting each other.

Chapter III

OTHER STORIES OF VIRGIN BIRTHS

It may be thought that the story of a virgin birth is too wonderful to have been invented merely to show that a misunderstood prophecy had been fulfilled, and that so miraculous a doctrine could not, without some basis of fact, suddenly be created by any brain, however fertile. But a study of ancient literature discloses the fact that myths of virgin births were part of many if not of all the surrounding pagan religions in the place where, and at the time when, Christianity arose.

"The gods have lived on earth in the likeness of men" was a common saying among ancient pagans, and supernatural events were believed in as explanations of the god's arrival upon earth in human guise.

About two thousand years before the Christian era Mut-em-ua,[1] the virgin Queen of Egypt, was said to have given birth to the Pharaoh Amenkept (or Amenophis) III, who built the temple of Luxor, on the walls of which were represented:—

1. The Annunciation: the god Taht[2] announcing to the virgin Queen that she is about to become a mother.

[1] Also known as Mautmes.

[2] Tat or Thoth. The name is variously transliterated. The god Taht of the Egyptians corresponded to Hermes of the Greeks, and to Mercury of the Romans. He was the messenger of the gods and also their scribe, the inventor and first teacher of the art of writing. In this capacity he was reputed to be the author of the very ancient Egyptian collection of precepts known as "The Maxims of Ani." The resemblance between some of these "Maxims of Ani" and the identifiable "Precepts of Jesus" (Logia), attributed to Matthew and incorporated into the Gospels of both Matthew and Luke, is so close that some Egyptologists have maintained that the name "Matthew" must have been derived from Maat = Mati = Matiu, the syzygy or twin-spirit of Taht. There is no doubt whatever that the Logos (the "word" of St. John) was identified by the Gnostics with Taht, and that Taht was closely connected, in the minds of the Egyptians, with Maat, the goddess of Truth and Justice; so there is much to be said for this theory.

2. The Immaculate Conception: the god Kneph (the Holy Spirit) mystically impregnating the virgin by holding a cross, the symbol of life, to her mouth.

3. The Birth of the Man-god.

4. The Adoration of the newly born infant by gods and men, including three kings (or Magi?), who are offering him gifts. In this sculpture the cross again appears as a symbol.

In another Egyptian temple, one dedicated to Hathor, at Denderah, one of the chambers was called "The Hall of the Child in his Cradle"; and in a painting which was once on the walls of that temple, and is now in Paris, we can see represented the Holy Virgin Mother with her Divine Child in her arms. The temple and the painting are undoubtedly pre-Christian.

Thus we find that long before the Christian era[1] there were already pictured in pagan places of worship virgin mothers and their divine children, and that such pictures included scenes of an Annunciation, an Incarnation, and a Birth and Adoration, just as the Gospels written in the second century A.D. describe them, and that these events were in some way connected with the God Taht, who was identified by Gnostics with the Logos.

And, besides these myths about Mut-em-ua and Hathor, many other origins of a virgin birth story can be traced in Egypt.

Horus was said to be the parthenogenetic child of the Virgin Mother, Isis. In the catacombs of Rome black statues of this Egyptian divine Mother and Infant still survive from the early Christian worship of the Virgin and Child to which they were converted. In these the Virgin Mary is represented as a black negress, and often with the face veiled in the true Isis fashion. When Christianity absorbed the pagan myths and rites it adopted

[1] The latest date assigned by Egyptologists to the carving of the Luxor sculptures is about 1500 B.C. Some authorities date them approximately 2000 B.C. The exact date is of no importance in the present argument.

also the pagan statues, and renamed them as saints, or even as apostles.

Statues of the goddess Isis with the child Horus in her arms were common in Egypt, and were exported to all neighbouring and to many remote countries, where they are still to be found with new names attached to them—Christian in Europe, Buddhist in Turkestan, Taoist in China and Japan. Figures of the virgin Isis do duty as representations of Mary, of Hariti, of Kuan-Yin, of Kwannon, and of other virgin mothers of gods.

And these were not the only pre-Christian statuettes and engravings of divine mothers and children. On very ancient Athenian coins such figures were stamped. Among the oldest relics of Carthage, of Cyprus, and of Assyria figures of a divine mother and her babe-god are found. Such figures were known under a great variety of names to the followers of various sects; the mothers as Venus, Juno, Mother-Earth, Fortune, etc., and the children as Hercules, Dionysos, Jove, Wealth, etc. In India similar figures are not uncommon, many of them representing Devaki with the babe Krishna at her breast, others representing various less well-known Indian divinities.

In Egypt we also find that "Apis, the sacred bull of Memphis, was believed to have been begotten by a deity descending as a ray of moonlight on the cow which was to become the mother of the sacred beast; hence he was regarded as the son of the god."[1]

This miracle was said to be constantly repeated.

An Apis[2]—so, according to Plutarch, said the Mathematici—was conceived every time a cow "in season" happened to be struck by a beam of light from the moon.

The Mathematici, of course, realized that the light of the moon was really the reflection of the light of the sun,

[1] Wiedemann's "Religion of the Ancient Egyptians," p. 188, quoted by Edward Clodd in his "Jesus of Nazareth," part i, section ii.

[2] Epaphus in Greek mythology.

and they therefore believed that the moon received her male generative power as proxy for the sun, the creator of all things.

Apis, the living calf, was regarded as a re-incarnation of Osiris, or at any rate as an emblem of the spirit or soul of Osiris.

It is difficult to assign the exact position in the divine hierarchy which polytheists believed their various gods to occupy. Their beliefs probably differed, and were certainly vague. The better-educated classes were doubtless then, as at all times, inclined to be sceptical, and to regard all these stories of different manifestations of divinity as more or less allegorical or symbolic; and, when they were not sceptical, their minds became so entangled in the complexities of metaphysical speculation that the stories they told grew very confused. On the other hand, the ignorant classes, both rich and poor, certainly believed in the most miraculous explanations of the pantheon which the priests could invent. By such people, the more improbable the alleged fact, the better was the story liked.

From this myth of a cow impregnated by a ray from the moon probably originated the story of the rape of Europa by Jove in the guise of a bull; the idea of a god incarnate in a bull easily giving rise to variants of that kind.

Perhaps the most curious and best known variant of the bull-lover theme is the story about Pasiphae, the wife of Minos. She was said to have conceived a violent passion for the bull which Poseidon (Neptune) had sent to her husband. So, with the aid of an artist named Dædalus, she disguised herself as a cow, and resorted to the meadow in which the bull grazed. The fruit of her union with the bull was the celebrated Minotaur, partly human, partly bovine, which Minos shut up in the Labyrinth. The ancient superstition that monsters have been born from the union of human beings and animals

survived until quite recently, and probably still exists among the uneducated and semi-educated. Exact, or comparatively exact, knowledge of the possibilities of hybridization is a science of quite recent growth.

It will be observed that the Minotaur was named after the husband of his mother, as well as after his real father the Tauros. That is a peculiarity of many of these stories.

Another Egyptian god, Ra (the Sun), was said to have been born of a virgin mother, Net (or Neith), and to have had no father.

In many other countries besides Egypt similar stories of the virgin birth of gods were told.

Attis, the Phrygian god, was said to be the son of the virgin Nana, who conceived him by putting in her bosom a ripe almond or pomegranate.[1]

Dionysos,[2] the Grecian God, was said in one version of the myth concerning him to be the son of Zeus out of the virgin goddess Persephone, and in another version to be the miraculously begotten son of Zeus out of the mortal woman Semelê. He, according to this story, was taken from his mother's womb before the full period of gestation had expired, and completed his embryonic life in Zeus's thigh. Dionysos was thus half human and half divine, born of a woman and also of a god.[3]

[1] See Frazer's "Adonis, Attis, and Osiris," pp. 163-64 (1906 edition). Pausanias and other authorities cited.

[2] Known also to the Greeks and later to the Romans as Bacchus.

[3] According to this version of the myth, Hêrê, who considered that she had prior claims to the affection of Zeus, discovered his amours with Semelê, and deceitfully induced the latter to ask her divine lover to come to her just as he was wont to approach the goddess. Zeus, unable to refuse her request, came to the bridal chamber in full dress—fiery chariot, lightning, and thunderbolts complete—and his mortal mistress forthwith died of fright and was consumed by fire. (The detractors of Semelê alleged that her lover was really a mortal man, and that she was struck by Zeus with a thunderbolt for daring to pretend that he was the father of her future child. The characters even of the heroines of fiction are not safe from the libels of the scandal-mongers!) But, so the myth continues, Zeus rescued the unborn child from the fire which consumed its mother, and sewed it into a hole made in his own thigh. There it completed the two or three months (versions differ) of its pre-natal existence before Zeus undid the stitches and gave birth to the child Dionysos.

His myth, which was current long before the Christian era, is a remarkable example of the kind of story which could be, and was, invented about a man-god. He was said to have been persecuted by Pentheus, King of Thebes,[1] the home of his mother; to have been rejected in his own country; and, when bound, to have asserted that his father, God, would set him free whenever he chose to appeal to him. He disappears from earth,[2] but re-appears as a light shining more brightly than the sun, and speaks to his trembling disciples; and he subsequently visits Hades. The story of his birth is alluded to, and the story of his persecution related, in "The Bacchæ," which Euripides wrote about 410 B.C., when the myth was already very old and very well known.[3]

Jason, who was slain by Zeus, was said to have been another son of the virgin Persephone, and to have had no father, either human or divine.

Perseus was also said to have been born of a virgin; and it is this story which Justin Martyr,[4] the second-century Christian "Father of the Church," stigmatizes as an invention of the Devil, who, knowing that Christ would subsequently be born of a virgin, counterfeited the miracle before it really took place.

The "Fathers of the Church" frequently gave this explanation of the numerous pre-Christian virgin birth stories to which their rivals tauntingly referred.

Adonis, the Syrian god; Osiris, the first person of the principal Egyptian Trinity; and Mithra, the Persian god whom so many of the Roman soldiers worshipped—all had strange tales told about their births.

At the time when Christianity arose all these gods were worshipped in various parts of the Roman empire.

[1] In Bœotia, subsequently one of the principal centres of his worship.

[2] But at Delphi sacrifices were offered up every year at the time of the winter solstice by the side of his alleged grave.

[3] He was spoken of as a Saviour who redeemed men by his blood. In Southern Italy, where his cult reached a high spiritual and ethical standard, he was worshipped jointly with a virgin goddess, Libera.

[4] In his "Dialogue with Trypho," c. 70.

Attis, Adonis, Dionysos, Osiris, and Mithra were the principal gods in their respective countries; and those countries together formed the greater part of the Eastern provinces of the Roman empire, and of its great rival, the Persian empire.[1]

Classical mythology is full of kindred stories, and the idea of a virgin birth was familiar to all men of that time.

Of Plato it was related that his mother Perictione was a virgin who conceived him immaculately by the god Apollo. Apollo himself revealed the circumstances of this conception to Ariston, the affianced husband of the virgin.[2]

Virginity, perhaps on account of its rarity in those days among women of a marriageable age, had always a halo of sanctity cast over it by barbaric and semi-civilized tribes; and even in civilized Rome itself the Vestal Virgins were looked upon as peculiarly sacred.

This reverence for virginity seems to have sometimes been contemporaneous with the institution of religious prostitution on a large scale. There is, indeed, no reason why this should not have been the case, incongruous though it seems to us, as such religious prostitution was looked upon very differently from the way in which it would now be regarded.

In origin it was an institution designed to bring fertility to the fields (by sympathetic magic). The sacrifice of chastity in the service of the goddess was an act of devotion, and not an act of licentiousness. Once again the reader must be reminded that when studying these customs we must remember that we are dealing with men and women brought up in an entirely different psychological climate from our own. A veneration for chastity was with them not incompatible with periodic

[1] In Persia itself Zoroastrianism, of which Mithraism was an offshoot, was the principal religion. Of Zoroaster's birth we shall say something later. See p. 141.

[2] See p. 133 for another legend about Ariston.

orgies, nor with places set aside for sacred prostitution, asceticism and such prostitution being regarded as alternative ways of making a sacrifice for the public good.

Doubtless an historian of the future may find it difficult to reconcile our own professions and our own practice in kindred matters, and will be confused by the protestations of virtuous horror which he reads alongside of accounts given by the same authors of conspicuous lapses from virtue.

The conventions of romance are not always the same as the customs of the people. They reflect the theory rather than the practice. Extremes are always more conspicuous than the mean.

An old story which curiously illustrates this same reverence felt for virginity by the ancients, in romance rather than in reality, is the myth about the children of Ægyptus and of Danaus.

The former had fifty sons; the latter fifty daughters. The former ruled over Arabia; the latter over Libya. They quarrelled over the kingdom of Egypt which the former had conquered, and when Ægyptus tried to patch up the quarrel by sending his sons to marry the daughters of Danaus the latter pretended to consent, but provided his daughters with daggers and with instructions how to use them. On their wedding night all the daughters of Danaus, save one, murdered their husbands in their sleep. Hypermnestra spared her husband Lynceus because he had respected her virginity, and not availed himself of his marital privileges.[1]

[1] The same theme forms the basis of all the stories of a woman who successively marries several husbands each of whom dies on his wedding night, until at last a husband is married who, having been advised by a holy man or a wizard how to act, respects her virginity for three days and nights. See Frazer's "Folk-Lore in the Old Testament," vol. i, for numerous examples.

The story about the Danaïdes is told somewhat differently by Æschylus in the "Suppliants." According to him, the ladies objected to their husbands because they were their first-cousins. According to yet another version of the story (the fragmentary Danaïdes), Lynceus exhibited no unusual self-restraint, but was spared by Hypermnestra, because the latter herself had succumbed to the power of love.

So Lynceus survived the slaughter of his brethren, and lived happily ever after with Hypermnestra, by whom he had at least one son.

It is not possible here to enter at length into the origin and history of the curious veneration for virginity which was current at this period, but it is of interest to note that the belief that some occult power was attached to this state of unblemished purity survived even up to the Middle Ages of our era.

For example, it was thought that virgins were peculiarly efficient as bait for Unicorns. The Unicorn, or rather his congener, the Monoceros—for it is of him that our present authority writes—was evidently a fastidious beast; only a virgin could attract him. On finding one tied up in the forest as a lure he was wont to kiss her, and then to fall asleep on her breast. Whereupon the brave hunter came up and slew him in his sleep. If the young woman was not really a virgin, the Monoceros immediately killed her, and disappeared before the hunter arrived.

This method of hunting the Monoceros is described in the "Bestiary" of Philip de Thaun, written in the twelfth century,[1] and is but one of the many strange facts alleged by authors of that period in support of the theory that virginity had special virtues when dealings were had with animals, with demons, and with human beings.

It was a semi-romantic, semi-religious halo which was cast over this particular physical condition.

To the Vestal Virgins in Rome were attributed the faculty of prophesying and many sacred virtues. All virgins were immune from death at the hand of the

[1] See "Bygone Beliefs," by H. Stanley Redgrove, who quotes the words of Philip de Thaun from Thomas Wright's "Popular Treatises on Science written during the Middle Ages in Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and English." See also Maury, "Légendes Pieuses du Moyen Age," pp. 176–77, footnotes, citing the same authority. This Bestiary is believed to have been founded upon the far older Christian collection of natural history tales (with morals attached to them) known as Physiologus. See "Ency. Britannica" for account of this very curious book.

executioner, and the Vestals enjoyed many other privileges so long as they preserved their chastity.[1]

The same idea is found "in the histories of miraculous virgins that are so numerous in the mythologies of Asia. Such, for example, was the Chinese legend that tells how, when there was but one man with one woman upon earth, the woman refused to sacrifice her virginity even in order to people the globe; and the gods, honouring her purity, granted that she should conceive beneath the gaze of her lover's eyes, and a virgin-mother became the parent of humanity."[2]

One of the legends which arose as Buddhism degenerated from its original lofty idealism was to the effect that the Buddha Gautama was given birth to by Maya,[3] an immaculate virgin who conceived him through a divine influence.

Gautama, the Buddha, was the son of a Hindu rajah named Suddhodana, and was born, in the ordinary course of nature, in 563 B.C.[4] He never claimed to be a god, neither did either he himself or his disciples claim that his birth was miraculous.[5]

But in after years a myth arose among Buddhists to the effect that his mother Maya, having been divinely chosen to give birth to the Buddha, was borne away by spirits to the Himalayas, where she underwent ceremonial purifications at the hands of four queens. The Bodhisattva then appeared to her, and walked round her three times. At the moment when he completed his peregrinations the Buddha (the incarnate Bodhisattva) entered her womb, and great wonders took place in heaven, on earth, and in hell.

[1] See some curious details given by Dion Cassius, and quoted by Lecky in his "History of European Morals" (p. 45 of R. P. A. edition). The subject of this veneration for virginity is treated in that work at some length.

[2] Lecky, op. cit., p. 44.

[3] Afterwards called Mahamaya, or Mahamia.

[4] Doubt has been thrown upon even this part of the tradition, but this is the usually accepted story.

[5] The same reticence is to be observed in the Gospel story of Jesus.

Her body became transparent, so that the babe could distinctly be seen before it was born;[1] and he was finally born without any of the pain and suffering which usually attend the births of mortal infants.[2]

The "multitude of the heavenly host," who, according to Luke only, sang before the shepherds as they watched their flocks by night while Jesus was being born, are paralleled in Buddhist scriptures by a heavenly host who worship the Buddha in heaven immediately before his descent into his mother's womb.

The miraculous birth is pre-announced both to Maya[3] and to her husband, King Suddhodana,[4] who parts from her for thirty-two months, so that she should live immaculately during the whole of that time.[5]

Maya, "in order that the (Buddhist) scriptures might be fulfilled," was on a journey when the birth took place, as, according to Luke, was Mary when Jesus was born.

Some of the Apocryphal Gospels give fuller details than the Canonical of the wonders attending the birth of Jesus, and in these, as also in the account given in the Koran,[6] the resemblances to the Buddhist legends are even more remarkable than those to be found, as we have already seen, in the Gospels according to Matthew and to Luke. The latter has, however, another story which corresponds closely with the earlier[7] Buddhist legends about Gautama.

The devout Simeon who is filled with the Holy Ghost and recognizes the child Jesus as the Christ (Luke ii,

[1] Pictures purporting to represent the Virgin Mary and exhibiting this transparent effect are still to be seen in Southern Europe.

[2] Some of the Gnostic Christians mentioned the same detail about the birth of Jesus, whose body, according to them, was only a phantasm.

[3] As, according to Luke (i, 26–38), it is to Mary.

[4] As, according to Matthew (i, 18–23), it is to Joseph.

[5] Compare the statement in Matthew (i, 35) about Joseph not "knowing" his wife until after the birth of Jesus.

[6] Jesus is referred to in the Koran, as the Mohammedans accept him as one of their great prophets. The Koran version of the infancy story was probably derived from some, now lost, Arabic gospel.

[7] Earlier compared with the Christian story.

25–35) is a duplicate of the Holy Brahmin Asita, who recognizes the child Gautama as the Buddha. He, Simeon, speaks of Jesus as "a light to lighten the Gentiles" (verse 32), using the same metaphor as is used in the gatha with which, later on in the story, the young Gautama is greeted by the rishis: "In the darkness of the world a light has appeared to lighten all who are in ignorance."[1]

And Matthew's story of Herod being told that one who would be "King of the Jews" had been born, and of the consequent massacre of the innocents, also corresponds with Buddhist legend.

Luke's account of the child Jesus confounding with his "understanding" all the learned doctors of the temple is a modified version of stories, told in the apocryphal "Gospel of the First Infancy," of the child Jesus' precocity in grammar, arithmetic, astronomy, and physics; and those stories are themselves paralleled by legends of the youthful Gautama's extensive knowledge, and of how he himself teaches the guru engaged for his education.

As, in the earliest Christian story, Jesus becomes Christ by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him at his baptism; so, in the original Buddhist story, Gautama becomes the Buddha while lying under the Bo tree. In the case of both religions the Virgin Birth stories came as later explanations of the spiritual uniqueness already accounted for otherwise.[2]

And, long before the rise of Buddhism, the story of Rāma's miraculous birth had been told to millions of Hindus.

Rāma was conceived, so the story went, by his mother

[1] Compare also Luke i, 79: "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."

[2] For a short account of historical Buddhism, followed by a reference to the Virgin Birth legend, see Draper's "Intellectual Development of Europe," vol. i, chap. iii (pp. 66–75 in George Bell and Sons' edition). For further details of birth story see Lillie's "Buddhism in Christianity" and "Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists," by Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy, or any other account of Indian religions.

drinking a sacred potion prepared by the god Vishnu himself.

The wives of King Dasharatha drank of this "divine rice and milk."

From one of them was born Rāma; from another, Bharāta; and from the third, who had drunk a double portion, Laksmana and Satrughna.

Thus Vishnu became not only the parent of, but, by re-incarnation, identical with, that Rāma whose virtues and exploits are celebrated in the great Indian epic, the Rāmayana, and whose worshippers can still be numbered by millions.

Sita, the bride of Rāma, was said to be not born of human parents, but sprung from a furrow as her reputed father ploughed the ground.

These Buddhist and Hindu myths are of course generally connected with the doctrine of re-incarnation. The God chooses a human father and mother, and then his soul enters the embryo of their child.

But this re-incarnation idea does not really distinguish them clearly from other virgin birth stories, as many of the latter, including the Christian story, involve the doctrine of a pre-existent being; and so the only distinction—and that more apparent than real—which can sometimes, though not always, be made is that in some of the Indian cases other human incarnations had previously taken place.

In some of the uncanonical stories of the incarnation of Christ it is said that the Christ spirit had previously been incarnate in Adam, Abraham, and other prophets, and it has even been alleged that it was subsequently incarnate in Mohammed.

Moreover, in a great number of these myths of miraculous births which are to be found, as might be expected, in the Hindu scriptures, the re-incarnation theme has been dropped out, and the popular story left free from all metaphysical subtleties.

A few more of the best known of these stories will now be referred to, but it should be remembered that in course of time, some of these myths being more than 3,000 years old, different versions have been evolved, and so, in minor details, discrepancies between the stories as here given and as related elsewhere may be detected.[1] As far as possible the best authorities have been consulted and followed.

The Pandāvas, the heroes of the Mahabharata, were not the sons of Pandu, though they took their names from him and were born of his wives Kunti and Madri. Their fathers were respectively the gods Dharma, Vāyu, Indra, and the Aswins, the latter twins and jointly the fathers of twins.[2]

Even the Kauravas, cousins and rivals of the Pandāvas, were abnormally, though in this case not divinely, born. One hundred of them were born at one birth, a number considerably exceeded by a lady named Sumati, who, according to another Indian myth, gave birth to a gourd which burst open and produced 60,000 children. There are of course many legends, even European, about the birth of large numbers of children at one time. A well-known one relates the circumstances in which a Countess of Henneberg gave birth in the year 1276 to 365 children at one time, half of them being male, half female, and the odd one an hermaphrodite![3]

The Pandāvas, like so many other divinely-born children, had to fly for their lives, because it was foretold to the King that they would one day reign in his stead and rule over his own children.

Before she married Pandu, Kunti, the future mother of three of these Pandāvas, had once been given a charm

[1] The variations are, in fact, no greater than those between Matthew and Luke.

[2] Perhaps it is unnecessary to note that joint parentage is a physiological impossibility. Among so many impossibilities a new one is not of great importance, the essence of a miracle being the infraction of law.

[3] See Wanley's "The Wonders of this Little World" (1806), vol. i, pp. 77, 78, for a list of more than a dozen authorities for this story.

which enabled her to have a child by any one of the gods whom she thought of.

Out of curiosity, she invoked the Sun, and by him became the mother of Karna, who was born fully clothed in armour.[1] This demi-god, Karna, is spoken of as "an emanation from the hot-beamed Sun," who was wont, on important occasions, especially to illumine by his rays his semi-mortal son living upon the earth.

To conceal the birth of a son so strangely begotten, Kunti placed him, soon after he was born, in a box made of wicker work, and floated him down the Ganges. Thence he was rescued by a charioteer who brought him up as his own child. Here we have a very old and very popular mythological theme. Moses, Sargon, and other heroes, given birth to in circumstances which the mother fears to reveal, or at times when all male children are threatened with death, are floated down rivers in wicker baskets.

It was not only to the virtuous heroes, but sometimes also to the wicked villains of mythology, that miraculous births were ascribed.

Kansa, the king of Mathura and persecutor of the divine hero Krishna, was said to be the child of an union, consummated by violence in the jungle, between a demon and the mortal woman Pavanareka.

In another myth Kartikeya, who was incarnated for the purpose of saving the gods from the armies of the demons, is said to have been given birth to by Ganga (the river Ganges), into whom (or which) the male germ of life had been dropped by Siva.

There are other curious myths about this god Kartikeya, who was supposed to have had six or seven mothers. This was accounted for, in one of these myths, by his having been suckled by six young women who were coming to bathe in the Ganges when he was born; and,

[1] A similarly martial entrance into the world is related, as we shall notice further on, of other gods and divine heroes.

in another myth, by Svaka, his actual mother, having successively assumed the forms of seven wives of Rishis on her visits to the god Agni (Siva), whom she repeatedly seduced.

An even more primitive myth is that which describes how Garuda, the bird god[1] who acted as Vishnu's chariot, was hatched from an egg which his mother, Vinata, a daughter of the patriarch Daksha, laid.

Many of these Hindu myths about the birth of their gods are, as we have before noted, stories of re-incarnation in what seemed to the Hindus to be very much the ordinary course of nature. Others, however, are very often accounts of a child being born merely as an effect of concentrated thought on the part of the parent God, such thought giving birth, or rise, to a divine-human being, who is thus a conception of the mind of the god concerned, a materialized emanation of the Supreme God, or of some minor deity. A considerable number of such asexual births are recorded in the Hindu Scriptures, and we can trace how what was probably originally a purely metaphysical speculation or poetical phantasy takes shape as a supposed material fact.[2]

The children are sometimes mental emanations, at others sprung from the glory of the God's countenance or from the sparks cast from his eyes, and in at least one case—Ganesa from Parvati—born of the emanations from the body of a goddess.

In some stories children begotten in the usual way are said to have been born in a strange manner, as, for example, by drops of sweat from the mother being received by trees, collected together by the wind, and matured by the sun. In this way did Pramlocki give

[1] The mythical animals Garuda, Hanuman, Ganesh, etc., are generally spoken of as gods; but it would perhaps be more accurate to describe them as divine servants of the gods, human in character, mentality, and voice, animal in shape, and divine in nature.

[2] Compare the Gnostic doctrine of the Logos, referred to hereafter.

birth to Marisha, the future mother of the patriarch Daksha, who has already been mentioned.

The belief in the generative power of the wind will be referred to later on, when we consider some of the curious physiological superstitions of the ancients; but it is of interest to notice, in connection with Indian mythology, that Hanuman, the monkey-shaped god, was said to have been begotten by the wind-god.

One Indian case of alleged incarnation of a god, notable in many ways, is especially remarkable, because it took place in comparatively modern times.

In 1640 Ganapati,[1] the Indian god of wisdom, is said to have appeared to a very holy Brahmin of Poona, and to have imbued him, as a mark of his especial favour, with a portion of his own Holy Spirit.

Muraba Goseyn thus became a portion of the god himself. This idea seems at first to be more nearly that of the Gnostic inspiration doctrine[2] than that of a more carnal connection with the god; but Ganapati went further than the inspiration of an individual, as he made a covenant that the senior descendants in tail male from Muraba Goseyn should unto the seventh generation likewise partake of his divine nature. The seventh descendant has now passed away, but only quite recently the last of these man-gods was still worshipped in India, and said to perform occasional miracles;[3] so easy is it to observe miracles when miracles are expected!

Kings have often assumed, or been granted by flattering courtiers, the titles of gods; but that a man of humble origin should, in the seventeenth century, found a dynasty of gods is indeed surprising.

The Pharaohs were all looked upon as divine—as the sons of god, or as the incarnations of some one god, or

[1] Otherwise known as Ganesha, or Ganesh.

[2] The descent of the Holy Spirit into Jesus, imbuing him with a portion of God.

[3] See "Hindu Mythology," by Wilkins, pp. 341–43.

even of several gods at the same time. This divinity was, of course, regarded as hereditary, and in order that the royal and divine blood should be kept absolutely pure it was enacted that the only legitimate sons of a Pharaoh were those born of his marriage with his own sister.

But even when the throne of the Pharaohs passed to a usurper, the latter, if he supported the priests, was soon able to annex the divine as well as the other titles of his predecessors, and to demand divine honours from his subjects.

It has been truly said,[1] regarding the deification of Alexander the Great by the Egyptian priests, that his being called the son of the god Amen[2] was merely a formality gone through by every usurper who seized the throne of the Pharaohs after overthrowing the preceding dynasty. It may be that neither the priests nor Alexander himself had any illusions about the matter; but the point which concerns us here is that the public of the day was prepared to accept the king as a god and as the son of a god.

Moreover, the legends about the birth of Alexander arose quite independently of any apotheosis of the king by the priests.

A supernatural parentage seemed, to the men of his time, the best explanation of genius such as his; and the very varieties that are to be found of the legend show that it originated in the usual way of legend-gossip passing into tradition, and not in the pronouncement of a priesthood.

According to the best-known version of the story, Philip of Macedonia, the ostensible father of Alexander, discovered his wife in the embraces of a serpent, and thereafter—whether from fear of sharing his connubial couch with so unpleasant a bed-fellow, or from fear of

[1] By Sir Gaston Maspero in "Comment Alexandre devenait Dieu." Cited by F. Legge in "Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity."

[2] Amen = Amun = Ammon = Jupiter Ammon.

offending the god, the legend does not relate—seldom entered her bed. The courtiers of Alexander accounted in this way for the birth of their master and hero, who was thus shown to be not only descended, through his legal father, Philip, from Hercules, but also from Jupiter, whose amours had been conducted in the lowly guise of the serpent.[1]

It is interesting to notice that the double pedigree holds good: the descent through the putative father and the descent through the actual father are both credited to the hero.

Another story relates that Nectanebus, having prophesied to Olympias, the mother of Alexander, that she would give birth to a son whose father would be the god Ammon, enjoyed, in the guise of that god, the embraces of the queen.

One of the favourite subjects for romance in ancient days was the love of gods for mortal women. That the gods were at times wont to visit favoured ladies was believed by all credulous folk, and nearly all men were credulous in those days.

Silvia, the wife of Septimius Marcellus, was said to have had a child by the god Mars;[2] and many similar stories were told, and believed, of other women, both illustrious and humble.

It may be that this legend about the wife of Septimius Marcellus arose from her name Silvia, as the mother of Romulus and Remus—so a still older myth related—was a vestal virgin named Rhea Silvia, and their father was Mars.[3]

Until a growing scepticism made the plot appear unreal,

[1] See Plutarch's "Life of Alexander the Great."

[2] Plutarch, cited by Frazer, "The Golden Bough," vol. ii, chapter iv, pp. 307–8, first edition (1890).

[3] Romulus and Remus, the mythical founders of the city of Rome, were, as every schoolboy knows, said to have been suckled by a she-wolf, as also was the founder of the Turkish race. The above-quoted myth includes a flagrant anachronism, as it provides a vestal virgin before the foundation of the city in which the order of vestals was first established.

or a more refined or hypocritical taste debarred such subjects from literature, comic authors of all countries were fond of writing tales about foolish women who, believing that they had found favour in the eyes of a god, gave themselves up to the embraces of cunning priests, or of secular gallants who had bribed the priests to help them in their trickery.

But sober historians also record as facts—and there is no reason for doubting these facts—several episodes of this kind.

Mundus, a Roman patrician—so Josephus and several other authors relate—bribed the priests of Isis to induce a married lady named Paulina, a devout worshipper of the god Anubis, to come to their temple at night to meet the god, whom they alleged to be enamoured of her charms. Mundus impersonated the god, and thus enjoyed the favours of the lady who, up till then, had always rejected his advances.[1]

Demaratus, the presumptive son of Ariston, about whose parentage, however, there were grave doubts, was told by his mother that there had come to her one night, in the appearance of Ariston, a man with a garland which he placed on her head, and that, upon the departure of this man, Ariston himself had come to her and inquired as to the origin of the garland which she was still wearing. He denied that he had visited her earlier in the night, and identified the garland as one which came from the temple of the god Astrabacus. The soothsayers who were called in and consulted about the affair declared that the visitor must have been Astrabacus himself.

Thus, if Demaratus was not the son of Ariston, he was the son of the god Astrabacus.[2]

This event was supposed to have taken place about the year 510 B.C., but long before that a somewhat similar tale was told about the birth of Hercules.

[1] See Josephus' "Antiquities of the Jews," book xviii, chapter iii, section 4.

[2] Herodotus vi, 69.

The latter's mother, Alcmena, was the wife of Amphitryon, who, at the time when our story begins, was away hunting the Cadmean vixen and performing other actions worthy of a Greek hero. Shortly before his return to his wife, Zeus assumed his likeness and took his place in Alcmena's bed, at the same time prolonging the night so that it lasted as long as three ordinary days and nights. On the next day Amphitryon returned, and, not finding himself so warmly welcomed as he hoped and expected, inquired the reason, and learnt that he had, so Alcmena thought, already spent the previous night with her. He then discovered the trick which the chief of the gods had played upon him. Alcmena subsequently gave birth to two boys, of whom Hercules, the son of Zeus, was older by one day than Iphicles, the son of Amphitryon.[1]

An event of a not dissimilar kind was reported of very much later days.

A Princess of Gazna is said to have been seduced

[1] This is another example of the curious belief, already referred to in connection with two of the Pandāva brothers (p. 127), in the possibility of joint parentage of twins. A better known case is that of Leda, the wife of Tyndareus, from whom were born at one birth Castor and Pollux, Helen and Clytaemnestra ; of whom Castor and Clytaemnestra were the children of Tyndareus, Pollux and Helen the children of Zeus. It was upon the occasion of this amour that Zeus took the form of a swan (Leda, in some forms of the myth, having previously taken the shape of a goose, so as to escape from his advances). Anyhow, that Leda on this occasion laid an egg is certain, as Pausanias himself saw the identical egg hanging from the roof of a temple at Sparta, and the priests told him all about it! Some say that there was only one egg, others that there were two ; but all are agreed that the quadruplets were born, and that two were the children of the god, and two the children of the human husband.

A far more numerous parentage was claimed for the god Pan. According to some ancient writers, Penelope was not so faithful to Ulysses as Homer relates, and, though she had refused to marry any of the 108 or 136 suitors whom Ulysses—according to various accounts—found wooing her, she became the mother of the aptly-named Pan (All or Everything), of whom all the suitors were the joint father.

About the paternity of Theseus there was some doubt, as his mother Æthra had, on the same night, been embraced by both the human Ægeus and the god Poseidon. Eventually it appears that both paternities were admitted. Theseus succeeded his human father as King of Athens, but claimed to be descended from his divine father, the ruler of the sea. Amphion, one of the twin sons of Antiope, was said to have been begotten by the god Asopus ; Zethus, the other twin, by the mortal Epopeus, King of Thebes.

by an adventurer named Malek, who pretended to be Mahomet.

These old stories, and others like them, were probably the origin of the numerous tales with a similar plot to be found in the novels of French and Italian authors of the Renaissance period and later.[1]

So the story of Nectanebus having impersonated the god Ammon and begotten Alexander may well have been invented by men anxious to detract from the fame of the Macedonian hero; but the female credulity which it alleges was certainly very common.

At the temple of Belus, at Thebes, a different woman used to be dedicated to the god every night, and to sleep in a chamber at the summit of the building. At the great temple in Babylon a similar custom existed. At Patara, in Lycia, a priestess was locked in the temple every night to receive the embraces of the god. Jupiter Ammon was visited by the most beautiful and most noble ladies in Egypt. Thus we learn, from classical authors, that the notion of the gods visiting mortal women and becoming fathers of their children was commonly entertained throughout the near East in Greek and Roman times.

Some of the priests must have known who it was that on these occasions impersonated the god; but probably others, and certainly the general lay public, believed that the god himself actually generated mortal children. We cannot tell for certain whether Alexander really came to believe that he was the son of Jupiter Ammon. Men in his position are subject to megalomania, and megalomaniacs are capable of entertaining such beliefs. But we do know that he posed as son of the god and was treated in his lifetime as divine, and that he demanded from his courtiers and other subjects the honours usually paid only to gods.

[1] See, for example, the second novel, fourth day, of Boccaccio's "Decameron."

He had been informed by the oracle of Ammon—flattering priests who impersonated the god—that he was the son of Zeus,[1] and, his pride swollen by conquest, he eventually seems to have believed that this was really a fact. That the priests should hail as God one who could and did shower rich presents upon them is not surprising; but that even the Greeks, in spite of their philosophy and their democratic theories, should so degrade themselves is to be accounted for only by the blinding effects on men's minds of success so striking and so vast as Alexander's. Man idolizes that which he fears, that which he envies, that from which wealth, power, and all other earthly blessings seem to flow.

Oriental nations, and, imitatively, even the Greeks in their degenerate days, showed a tendency to deify their kings and generals, and, even when they did not actually worship them, to give them titles which we are inclined to regard as Divine, such as "Soter" (Saviour), a title given to Ptolemy I, and "Epiphanes," a title given to Antiochus IV.[2]

Lysander and others, besides Alexander, were also given divine honours during their lifetime.

Demetrius was hailed by the Athenians as the Only God. "When we consider the divine or semi-divine honours paid in historical times to men like Miltiades, Brasidas, Sophocles, Dion, Aratus, and Philopoemen, whose real existence is incontestable, it seems impossible to deny that the tendency to deify ordinary mortals was an operative principle in ancient Greek religion."[3] The

[1] Zeus and Ammon were identified when Greek culture permeated Egypt; and subsequently Jupiter, the Roman counterpart of Zeus, was also identified with Ammon. By a process of syncretism all gods tended to be identified with each other.

[2] Epiphanes is an abbreviation of "Theos Epiphanes," which means "God Manifest." Antiochus I was also surnamed "Soter"; and Antiochus II was actually entitled "Theos" (God).

[3] "Apollodorus" (vol. i, Introduction, pp. xxiii–xxiv), by Sir James Frazer, who cites Herodotus, Thucydides, Diodorus Siculus, Polybius, Plutarch, and Pausanias as his authorities.

distinction between human and divine seemed so small to anthropomorphists as to be entirely negligible.

Many of the Roman emperors also were, during their lifetime, worshipped as gods, and, after their death, admitted to the Pantheon. The emperor Hadrian, by a decree, deified his favourite Antinous, who had been drowned in the Nile.[1]

The precise relation of these transitory cults to the real religions of the near East cannot, of course, be determined exactly; but the fact of their having existed shows the readiness of men in those ages to set up new gods, and to accept mortal men as gods.

Like individuals, some cults die in youth, by accident or by not being well fitted to survive in competition with others. In Western Asia and the neighbouring lands scores of religions have arisen and left records, more or less blurred, of their existence. Doubtless many scores of others have arisen and disappeared without leaving any distinguishable traces behind them.

Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are the most conspicuous survivors of a host of cults which, at different times, sprang, apparently suddenly, into existence; many of them with doctrines and stories not very dissimilar to those of their more fortunate rivals.

With these stories we are not at present concerned, except in so far as they incorporate a miraculous birth story. This the Zingis Khan legend does.[2]

When Zingis the Mogul had conquered a great part of Asia and become master of a formidable and aggressive empire and a terror to the whole Eastern world, his courtiers evolved for him a genealogy which traced his descent seven generations back to an immaculate virgin.

[1] For examples of deification of Roman emperors see Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," chapter iii. See also beginning of his chapter iv for deification of the Empress Faustina, a lady also celebrated for the number of her amours and the skill with which she concealed them from her doting husband.

[2] See Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," chapter lxiv.

He received the title of Son of God, and divine honours from his subjects.

Even when the founder of a family has neither known nor cared about the names of his ancestors, his descendants and their courtiers usually invent a pedigree suitable for the wealthy and powerful. The pedigree of Togrul Beg, the first of the Seljuk dynasty,[1] was unknown to contemporary experts in genealogy. Yet, when the Seljuks had carved out a vast empire for themselves and the Turks, a lengthy pedigree was attached to the name of their founder, and at the beginning of that family tree we find the name of Alankavah, who is described as a virgin mother.[2]

Nurhachu, who was born in 1559 A.D. and eventually united for the first time all the Manchu tribes into one great confederacy which conquered the Chinese Mongols, was the grandson of Aisiu Gioro. The latter, so the Chinese legend relates, was made chieftain of his tribe because of his miraculous birth. He was the son of a virgin, into whose lap, as she sat on the banks of a lake, a red fruit was dropped by a magpie. The effect of the red fruit was such that she immediately conceived, and nine months later gave birth to a son, Aisiu Gioro, who was destined to become the grandfather of the great Nurhachu.[3] Thus do legends arise to account for the birth of great men!

The Scythians, who inhabited the Crimea and Southern Russia, had a tradition that their race was descended from a man named Targitaus, who was a child of Jove and "a daughter of the Borysthenes"—i.e., of God and of a mortal woman.[4]

The approximate date of the birth of Targitaus would

[1] The first as regards Seljuks of historical importance; the third if Seljuk himself is taken as the founder of the family. Togrul's father and grandfather were known; the rest of his pedigree was invented.

[2] See Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," chapter xlvii, for authority.

[3] See "China," by Robert Douglas, chapter iii, p. 64 (T. Fisher Unwin).

[4] Herodotus iv, 5.

be, according to the Scythian legend, about 1500 B.C.[1]

The Greeks told another story, attributing the birth of one Scythes, the first Scythian, to the union of Hercules —that always prolific parent—with a being who was half woman and half serpent. This being had stolen his mares, so that Hercules was unable to continue the journey upon which he was engaged; and she refused to surrender them unless Hercules made her his mistress. The satisfaction of her demands resulted in triplets, of which Scythes was the youngest.[2]

Herodotus also relates that the Tauri worshipped a virgin goddess.[3] This was probably either Iphigenia or Artemis, to both of whom we refer elsewhere. Around the birth of Tamerlane arose many curious legends, which are gravely recorded by his biographers.

The lowly as well as marvellous birth of heroes is likewise a common feature of legends and myths. For example, Sargon, the semi-legendary king of Accad, one of the earliest rulers of whom any historical records have been found, is made to describe himself as

> Sargon, the mighty king, the king of Agade, am I;
> My mother was lowly, my father I knew not.
> * * * * * *
> My lowly mother conceived me; in secret she
> brought me forth.

Gudea,[4] a Sumerian king, later in time than Sargon but reigning as early as the first half of the third millennium B.C., used, it is recorded, to boast that he had neither father nor mother. He worshipped the god Ningirsu, who is said to have visited him in much the same way as the god of the Israelites is said to have visited their patriarchs, and to have given him injunctions as to the building of temples, the purification of cities, the burnt-offerings to be made at his own shrines, and

[1] Herodotus iv, 7. [2] Ibid, iv, 8–10. [3] Ibid, iv, 103.
[4] For accounts of Sargon and Gudea see Rogers' "History of Babylonia, Assyria, and Chaldea," vol. ii, bk. ii, chap. ii.

the false priests to be destroyed; all much in the same manner as in the Jewish legends Yahweh is said to have done.

Even when the birth of the hero is not alleged to be virginal, it is distinguished in some way or other from the birth of ordinary men. In one type of such stories great men are said to have been removed from the wombs of their mothers by an operation, instead of being extruded in the normal manner. Julius Cæsar is said to have thus been brought into the world. Shakespeare in one of his plots uses this same theme. Macbeth is told by the witches that he cannot be slain by man of woman born, and is eventually killed by Macduff, who "was from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd." There is nothing miraculous alleged; yet such stories show how prevalent was the belief that famous men were usually born in some exceptional manner, and that men born in an unusual way were capable of doing things impossible to ordinary men.

Shakespeare is not writing history, but weaving into his tale a popular legend of great antiquity. The authors of the Cæsarian story, on the other hand, were writing what they intended for history. Such stories used to be regarded as facts, fully explanatory of genius and good fortune; they came to be regarded as fictions, very useful in the making of plots. Not that the operation has not often been performed by modern surgeons, perhaps even by ancient physicians; but it is no longer regarded as being an adjunct of genius, a portent, or a mark of divine esteem.

To the founders, mythical or historical, of all great religions virginal or other remarkable births are usually attributed. To the Buddha's birth we have already referred, as also to the myths about Attis, Adonis, Dionysos, and Osiris. Three other great religions remain to be noticed.

Lao-Tzŭ, the actual or semi-legendary philosopher,

whose works form the foundation of the now degenerate Taoist, and perhaps even of the still lofty Confucian, religions in China, is said to have been the son of Lao, a virgin who conceived him by the sight of a falling star.[1]

Among the legends which, after his death, grew up round the name of Zarathustra—or Zoroaster, as he is now better known—was one to the effect that his mother conceived him by drinking a cup of Homa, the sacred drink which so often figures in Persian and (as Soma) in ancient Hindu legends.[2]

The educated Zoroastrian of to-day does not believe in such myths; but, as in other religions, its myths were at one time believed by all men, and are still believed by the less well educated.

It is said that Amina, the mother of Mohammed, told the latter's grandfather that she had seen, shortly before the birth of the Prophet, a light which illuminated the whole neighbourhood proceeding from her body.[3]

Another story told of Amina is, though not impossible, exceedingly improbable. This is to the effect that her husband, the father of Mohammed, was so handsome and attractive that on the night of his wedding with Amina two hundred disappointed maidens died of jealousy and despair.

Islam is, however—probably on account of the comparative lateness of its origin, and because of the fierce historical light which shone upon it from the beginning—very much poorer in birth stories, and indeed in all stories of the miraculous, than any of the other great religions of the world, and this though it conquered lands

[1] Lao-Tzŭ, the nominal founder of the original Taoism—one of the greatest religions of the world both in the excellence of its maxims and the number of its adherents—is said to have lived about 600 B.C.

[2] Zoroaster is also believed to have lived about 600 B.C. The Parsees of Bombay are the principal surviving sect of Zoroastrians; but until the Mohammedan conquest Zoroastrianism was the State religion in Persia, and numbered many followers elsewhere.

[3] Compare the "light to enlighten the world" theme of the Buddhist myth quoted above (p. 125) and Luke's use of the same motive.

where such miraculous stories were exceedingly common. One of its predecessors in Western Asia was Manichæism, a post-Christian religion which blended Christian and Zoroastrian doctrines, with some peculiar to itself, into a whole which was sometimes regarded by Christians themselves as a heresy and sometimes as a pagan religion.

The Manichæans related that a certain Terebinthus, said to have been the writer of the books whence Manes, their founder, learnt his doctrines, was born of a virgin. If there is any truth in the traditions about Terebinthus, he must have lived in the first or the early part of the second century A.D.; and this story of his virgin birth would thus be another example of the facility with which claims to such miraculous births were made and granted at that period in the world's history. Even if Terebinthus himself is altogether mythical,[1] the fact that the story was told shows that it was credible to men of the third century. That it was considered not only credible, but even probable, that men of great piety should be born of virgins is illustrated by a much later example of such a story.

Even of St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominican order of monks, it was related that he was born of an immaculate conception; and perhaps to this twelfth-century saint belongs the honour of being the last man in Europe—though, as we have already seen, not in Asia—for whom a virgin birth has been claimed. However, this myth was not very widely accepted, and it is now devoutly interred in various old biographies of the saint, whence it is unlikely to be resurrected even by his most ardent admirers.

A curious Christian sect known as the Nazoreans, or Sabæans, which is still to be found in the neighbourhood of Basra, believe that John the Baptist was conceived by

[1] The implied chronology of the story renders it very suspicious. The period to be bridged between Scythianus, the alleged teacher of Terebinthus, and Manes (216–275 A.D.), the heir of his doctrines, seems too long to be possible.

the chaste kisses imprinted on the lips of the elderly Elizabeth by her husband Zacharias.[1]

Stories about miraculous births are to be found in folk-lore as well as in religious histories and traditions.

A Sicilian tale, probably very old, tells of a king's daughter who was shut up in a tower which had no aperture through which the sun could shine, as it had been foretold that she would conceive a child by the sun, and her father was anxious to prevent this occurrence. The girl, however, made with a piece of bone a small hole in the wall, and a sunbeam, entering through this hole, impregnated her.[2]

Among the Red Indians of the North American continent similar tales are told about women who have become pregnant by being struck by the rays of the sun as they lie upon their beds. The children thus conceived eventually visit the sun, and, like Phaëton in the old story told by Ovid and by many of his predecessors, take over their father's business for one day, and nearly involve the whole world in destruction by their inexperienced clumsiness in driving his chariot or in controlling his heat.[3]

This form of the miraculous birth story has also a long ancestry. Danaë was said to have been impregnated by Zeus in the shape of a shower of gold which fell in her lap, though she had been shut up by her father Acrisius in a brazen chamber specially built to protect her from such an untoward event.[4]

A Siberian maiden of the Kirgis tribe, in another myth of a similar nature, was impregnated by the eye of God.[5]

[1] See "Légendes Pieuses," p. 211, note 1, by Maury, who cites Burckhardt's essay on the Nazoreans.

[2] Schneller, cited by Frazer, "The Golden Bough," vol. ii, chapter iv, p. 230 (first edition).

[3] See Frazer's "Apollodorus," appendix xi, for examples of these stories. See also "The Golden Bough," as cited above, pp. 237–38, footnote, for examples of the widespread idea of the sun's power of impregnation.

[4] Perseus, the child thus strangely begotten, was another of those children who were, shortly after their births, floated off in chests on rivers or the sea; while Acrisius was another of those kings who were warned that a child about to be born would eventually kill them.

[5] See "The Golden Bough," p. 237.

The peculiarity of this form of the story is that the mortals are generally said to make every endeavour to avoid the woman's union with the god. With great plausibility, therefore, some of the ancients themselves attributed this class of legend to explanations given of the birth of illegitimate children. No one would have thought of doubting a story by which the reputation of the king's daughter was not only preserved, but enhanced. Why should they wish to doubt it? They had all heard curious stories of similar events having taken place long ago in other countries, and now they were in the fortunate position of being almost eye-witnesses of so glorious a sign of divine favour. They could tell their children and grandchildren, and strangers from other less-favoured lands, a tale to make them wonder, and could vouch for it as having happened to their own immediate knowledge.

We have all learned of late years, even if we did not know it before, how men and women are apt to claim immediate and intimate personal knowledge of events which have really never taken place; how otherwise honest persons will claim to have seen with their own eyes, or to have heard with their own ears, things which were never done and words which were never spoken.[1] In olden days such legends, once well started, were seldom contradicted. No inquisitive sceptics made inquiries and shattered beliefs in new fairy tales. No enterprising newspaper proprietors re-awakened the flagging interest of their clients by contradicting this week the exciting story they had vouched for last week. Gossip became legend, and legend became myth, with no historians searching archives for documentary proofs or cross-

[1] The Russian troops passing through England in 1914, the shooting as spies in the Tower of London of various notabilities, the sinking of the entire British fleet, and numerous other myths of the War period, will occur to most people as typical examples of events spoken of as facts of which they had first-hand knowledge by various lovers of sensation and exaggeration.

examining the witnesses. Men, then even more than now, longed for romance rather than for facts.

These last examples, however, have been culled from folk-lore, and we must now return to the regions of religion, which can still furnish us with further examples of the widespread existence of virgin-birth stories.

The idea of a man-god born of a virgin was conceived so early in the history of mankind that it was carried into America in that remote age when men first migrated into that continent.

Huitzilopotchli, the god of war and chief deity of the ancient Mexicans, was said to have been miraculously conceived by a virgin.

His mother, a mortal woman named Coatlicue, saw a ball of bright-coloured feathers floating in the air. She took this ball, placed it in her bosom, and by its touch found herself pregnant. Afterwards she gave birth to the god, who entered the world fully armed.[1]

The detail about the war-god or hero being born fully armed is common to many myths. We have already noticed the case of Karna, the son of Kunti by the Sun, who was so born. Athena is the most notable of the gods and goddesses who entered this world fully armed. Of her it was related that she sprang from the head of Zeus, which had been cleft by Prometheus, or, as others said, by Hephæstus. The detail about the impregnation by touching the brightly coloured feathers has also many parallels, notably the case of Juno, who, on being touched by a flower—or, as some said, by the help of the goddess Flora—conceived the war-god Mars.[2]

This is the Latin version of the still older Greek myth according to which Hêrê, "without being united in love"

[1] See Prescott's "Conquest of Mexico," book i, chapter iii, note; and Clavigero's "History of Mexico," book vi, s. 14.

[2] The story is related in Ovid's "Fasti." Mars, before he became a war-god, was the god of Agriculture, and probably the floral-conception idea arose while the god still had a peaceable character connected with horticulture.

—"without intercourse with the other sex"—gave birth to Hephæstos,[1] and conceived Ares by the touch of a flower. Of this goddess Hêrê it was said that after losing her virginity by marriage with Zeus she recovered it annually by bathing in the spring of Canathus.

It is curious to meet this poetical phantasy again in regions as far afield as the South Pacific Ocean and Eastern Asia. In Tahiti the goddess Hina is believed to have conceived by passing under the shadow of a leaf which the god shook. In China it was said that virgins sometimes conceived children by the mere act of smelling roses.[2] The Indians of the Queen Charlotte Islands, in Canada, tell a story about a certain chief's daughter who conceived by accidentally swallowing a leaf as she drank a draught of water. This leaf was really a raven who had assumed this disguise in order to gain admittance to the chief's house; and so, nine months later, the young woman gave birth to a child who was really the raven in human form. Thus, either spontaneously or through some source which cannot now be traced, the inhabitants of America, as well as of other places remote from those which we first considered, had formed or inherited the idea that gods were born of virgins, and that divine beings—including in that term the animal ancestors of totem worshippers—though born of mortal women, could not be conceived in the vulgar manner.

Possibly such an idea arises necessarily and naturally from a belief in a god who walks upon earth as a man; but the resemblance of minor details in the European and

[1] Of females giving birth to sons who had no fathers we have already told many stories. Hephæstos (Vulcan) furnishes an example of a male who begets a son who has no mother. He was pursuing Athena, who eluded his ardent embrace, and his passion resulted in the birth of Erichthonius. (See Frazer's "Apollodorus," "The Library," iii, xiv, 6.)

[2] The first Jesuit missionaries to China were vastly surprised to find that a virgin-birth story was already told in that empire, about Fuh-ke, who was born about 3468 B.C. (See "A Modern Zoroastrian," by S. Laing, p. 155.) This Fuh-ke or Fohi, the legendary founder of the Chinese Empire, was said to have been conceived by his mother—Ching-mon—eating a flower.

the American stories makes it probable that the myths all come from the same pre-historic Asiatic source.

In other parts of the North American continent the virgin-birth story takes a different form—one of great interest, because it has some very curious resemblances to the Christian story, though these stories must have developed quite independently.

> The North American Indians have many traditions of a disobedient virgin who gives birth, by magical impregnation, to a being who at an early age develops the characteristics of a miracle worker.....the manifestation of altruism on the part of the hero personage in behalf of human beings, the destruction of existing monsters and personified evils.....and finally.....the departure of the hero to another world, after leaving his promise to return again in some future time of need to benefit his people.[1]

All this may, indeed, differ in unimportant mythological details from the Gospel stories of the Virgin Birth, but it corresponds remarkably closely with the ethical conceptions of the authors of the remaining parts of the Gospel story. The demi-god is represented as the Saviour of humanity, and not only as the slayer of monsters and enemies. He is an altruist who devotes his life to the service of others, and not a mere hero of epic melodrama.

Travelling further afield, we still find the idea of gods living upon earth ; but the conceptions are more primitive, and to be classed perhaps somewhere between the animist theory of spirits inhabiting inanimate objects and the anthropomorphic doctrine of gods like men.

In Samoa, even at the present day, men believe that their gods are incarnate in their sacred animals; and doubtless in Egypt and in India similar beliefs preceded the doctrine that the gods had ever become incarnate in men.

We cannot tell how long ago it was that this idea of the miraculous conception of a god was first formed, but

[1] "Primitive Religion," by F. G. Speck, Ph.D. ; chapter i of "Religions of the Past and Present." (J. B. Lippincott Company ; 1918.)

it was certainly formulated in pre-historic times, as it is to be traced in the very earliest historical records.

In the very ancient Cretan religion, which flourished before the days of Greek civilization, the chief goddess who was worshipped had a youthful companion, a young god, who was said to be her immaculately conceived son. The goddess herself was spoken of as a virgin.[1]

Again, in some of the numerous ancient forms of phallic worship, virgins were deflowered by a priapus made of stone or some other hard material;[2] and in one of the legends connected with this custom a semi-divine person, Ocrisia, was said to have been conceived by this method.[3]

Though we are not likely to agree with the views of those who trace all myth motives to phallic or kindred origins, there is no doubt about the great antiquity of phallic worship, or of its widespread nature. But there are other possible sources to be explored if we desire to embark upon the hopeless search for beginnings.

Some people have argued that the universal myths of

[1] See "The Religion of Greece," by W. W. Hyde; chapter x of "Religions of the Past and Present."

[2] At Alexandria, even as late as the beginning of the Christian era, rites of a similar nature still took place, when young girls were first admitted by the priests to the temple of Aphrodite for the purpose of becoming religious courtesans. This is not the place to discuss religious by-products, but it should be noted, before we sneer at the customs of olden days and of other climates, that organized temple prostitution does not in every respect compare unfavourably with the unorganized public prostitution of the streets of our great cities.

[3] See "Sexual Life of Our Times," chapter vi, by Iwan Block, M.D. A belief in the fertilizing power of phalli and of figures representing Priapus is still common in India and elsewhere, and is the cause of some curious practices carried on by sterile women in those countries. Such practices were, even as late as last century, not uncommon even in Christian countries. Hartland cites authorities for stories about statues of Christian saints being used in this way—sometimes apparently sculptured for the purpose—in France, Holland, and Belgium. (See "Primitive Paternity," vol. i, pp. 63-4, 125-30, 148.) The ecclesiastical authorities have now, it seems, suppressed these practices by removing the objects of scandal. The superstition is doubtless a relic of sympathetic magic. It is most unlikely that women, in modern days, ever believed that the phallus was father of any children which were born after such practices had been indulged in, but in olden days not only phalli but other stones were often credited with the actual parentage.

semi-civilized mankind all have their remote origins in astronomical events, or are derived from the names of the constellations. Thus, when the sun began the new year in the constellation Virgo, his birth on December 25 in each year was greeted by his worshippers with the cry, "The Virgin hath brought forth." The constellation was "the celestial virgin," and the title "celestial virgin" was sometimes given to Juno, and to Cybele, "the mother of all the gods." Possibly, perhaps probably, allegorical explanations of astronomical phenomena were one of the sources from which some myths were derived; doubtless there were other sources as well, and the myths as we know them were gradually evolved from a very varied ancestry. Even if we were able to trace the descent of a myth in tail-male for a few ages, we should not necessarily have learnt much. Through maternal and more remote matronly influences also characteristics must have been inherited. And this analogy rather under-estimates than over-estimates our difficulties, the variety and complexity of mythology being extraordinarily great.

By the time that Greek mythology had reached the earliest stage which has survived for our inspection, bewilderment, and admiration, we find that there is already a very large number of virgin goddesses.

Many of these goddesses were eventually identified with each other, and said to be merely the same person under different names; but others always remained distinct.

When we come to Roman times we meet with many new names of goddess mothers, some of which are undoubtedly synonyms for the earlier Greek divinities, though others are distinct from them. Some of these were virgin mothers of mortals; others were ordinary mothers of the immortals.

Among these Greek and Roman names, of which several are really synonymous, are Artemis, Iphigenia, Athena, Pallas, Hêrê, Juno, Agdistis, Cybele, and Rhea. The last-named is identifiable with Agdistis and with

Cybele, and was known as "The Mother of Zeus," "The Mother of the Gods," and "The Great Mother."

We need not here consider the details of the myths connected with such of these goddesses as we have not already referred to, since it is with human mothers of God that we are now more nearly concerned, and we have already noted how familiar the ancients were with miraculous birth stories.

Neither is it necessary, in this brief survey of the best-known miraculous birth stories, to refer to the births of demi-gods and mortal heroes from mortal women and gods, or from goddesses and mortal men, where such births were not miraculous in any other respect than as being the result of a union between a mortal and an immortal.[1]

But the fact that this title of "The Mother of God," so familiar to the pagans, was transferred to Mary should not be overlooked. When in later years Catholics began to worship Mary as "The Mother of God," it caused great scandal among those—many of them devout Christians, but convinced monotheists—to whom the notion of God having a human mother, or indeed a mother of any kind, was most abhorrent.

Civilization having advanced, the new "Mother of God" was indeed pictured as a more refined being than the old "Mother of the Gods."

Mary, the new conception, was a pure and refined virgin; Cybele, the old conception, had been looked upon as an emblem of fertility, and sometimes represented in sculpture as having teats as numerous as those of a bitch or of an old sow.[2]

[1] Æneas, for example, was said to be the son of Aphrodite by the mortal Anchises; but, whatever claims to the love of mankind Aphrodite may have had, virginity was certainly not one of them. There are hundreds of other cases like that of the pious Æneas, but we should be straying too far from our subject were we to consider them. Youthful struggles with the epics of Homer and of Virgil may have left with many of us recollections of some of them.

[2] This, however, was not the only Roman conception of a goddess mother. The Romans also worshipped a "Bona Dea," a goddess emble-

The fancies of a coarser age were also illustrated in some of the statues of Isis which represented the virgin mother of Horus wearing a sistrum—an article somewhat similar to that afterwards known as a "ceinture de chasteté"—as a symbol of her perpetual virginity.

The art of a more refined age returned to the style of sculpture which had been used to represent the ancient Chaldean virgin goddess and her child, and in the simpler statues of Isis and her child; and many of these figures, as well as of the ceremonies and ideas connected with these ancient pagan goddesses, were transferred to the new cult of the Virgin Mary.[1] The conquered absorbed the conqueror: Christianity became permeated by Paganism. And this in despite of the attempts frequently made to formulate the Incarnation doctrine in metaphysical terms.

The pagan tales of mortal women being visited by gods made no pretence that the progeny of such unions were conceived by any other than the ordinary physical process. The Christian theologians, on the other hand, sometimes attempted to show that, though they used physiological terms, they were really speaking of a spiritual process. These attempts were, as must be the case when men use one set of words to imply another set of opinions, doomed to failure. The pagan tales described conceivable, though incredible, miracles; while such Christian apologists described a process which cannot be conceived, being not only miraculous, but indescribable in any terms which are not self-contradictory.

The conception of a living creature is brought about by

matic of wifely and motherly devotion. In Greece, too, the better-educated classes regarded even Aphrodite more as an emblem of sacred than of profane love. But the popular conceptions of the goddesses were certainly rude. The virgin goddesses did not in all cases remain virgin for ever. They sometimes, as we have already seen was the case with Hêrê, eventually married; and they occasionally, but not often, had large families. We refer later on to the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity.

[1] See Chapter VII.

the conjunction of a spermatozoon with an ovum.[1] If a living creature owes its origin to any other process, that origin may or may not be miraculous, but it certainly is not a conception. The same word is used for the mental conception of an abstract idea and for the physical conception of an embryo, but it is used in an entirely different sense; and a further miracle is certainly required if men are ever to be enabled to understand how those processes—the mental conception and the physical conception—could have been combined. Men may be prepared to believe that a human embryo has once been formed in a woman's womb without any male assistance. That may be comprehensible, though to most people it is incredible. Men may be prepared to believe that a God miraculously conceived in His mind a being of real flesh and blood. That may, to some people, appear credible, though incomprehensible. A combination of the two processes is, however, not only incredible, but also incomprehensible.

This, however, is what the Christian theologians attempted. On the one hand, the virgin-birth story, as known to the pagans, had been introduced into their story; and, on the other hand, the Gnostic doctrine, that the Logos, an emanation from the Supreme Mind, had become flesh and blood, was also part of their story. They tried to combine the two conceptions, the mental and the physical. The Spirit of God had, so they said, fertilized Mary. The doctrine retains, or adds to, the coarseness of the pagan myths, while at the same time substituting for the simple physiological process of the latter an incomprehensible process.

The theologians found themselves in a dilemma, and had, since they desired to retain the very popular virgin

[1] The fertilized ovum or cytula, a single cell, multiplies itself asexually into the vast number of cells which form a living body. Though thousands of these cell generations are produced asexually, no new living vertebrate individual is formed without a sexual conjunction to form the cytula.

birth doctrine, to set aside considerations of its incongruity with their other doctrines, even if they fully appreciated those considerations. They were not men of a scientific habit of thought, though they were, or should have been, far better informed about physiology than were the men of pre-historic days, among whom all the curious stories which we have already noted originated.[1]

It may throw some light upon the origin of these myths if we, for a few moments, consider the ideas which men had about the ordinary physiological processes of nature.

[1] Origen, for example, notes that parthenogenesis is a fact of natural history, but wrongly ascribes it to some vertebrates.

Chapter IV

SUPERSTITIONS AND MYTHS ABOUT CONCEPTION

We shall not be so surprised at the number of these ancient myths of miraculous births if we remember that it was not until many hundreds of years later than the eras in which they originated that the physiological processes of sexual generation were understood. Even among races who practised the artificial fertilization of plants, it was not suspected until quite recently that this fertilization was analogous to sexual generation.[1]

These ancient peoples knew enough to make these stories appear wonderful, but not enough to make them incredible. All conception seemed miraculous, and so abnormal conception was but a small step further on the road of incomprehensibility.

Man in his most primitive state does not, it seems, connect births with sexual unions. That this relation of cause and effect should not be recognized may appear incredible to more sophisticated people, but that it is not recognized is well attested, and is, really, not so curious as it at first sight appears. The interval between the relative union and its consequence is so long that the two events would not necessarily appear to men of very low mental development as cause and effect, any more than to animals sequences divided by even comparatively short intervals of time can appear to be relative causes and effects.

Immediate or almost immediate results alone strike animals and savages of the most primitive types as

[1] See below, pp. 157–58.

connected with their antecedents. It has been found that even at the present day certain aboriginal Australian natives believe that births are caused by the entrance into prospective mothers of ancestral spirits, and have no connection with the union of the sexes.

Such unions can, they know, take place without any result, and it has apparently not struck them that births never take place without such previous unions. Even if the anthropologists—Messrs. Spencer and Gillen—who report this misunderstanding,[1] are themselves partly mistaken, and the natives do recognize some sort of connection between the two events, it appears undoubted that these savages consider that the real conception is brought about by some action of these spiritual agents—the ancestral spirits. Among races inclined to be sterile such a belief might easily arise.[2]

It is thought by some anthropologists that this idea, which still survives in Queensland, was once common to all mankind in the animistic stage of culture,[3] and this indeed appears highly probable when we think of our ancestors even in those days as little better, mentally, than animals, who certainly cannot connect the gratification of a transient passion with its long subsequent, and not inevitable, result.

The Aruntas of Australia "believed that conception was occasioned by the woman passing near a Churinga—a peculiarly shaped piece of wood or stone, in which a spirit-child was concealed, which entered into her."[4] Here we

[1] "The Northern Tribes of Central Australia," by Spencer and Gillen. See also Frazer's "Golden Bough," citing Roth.

[2] See Sir Ray Lankester's "Primitive Beliefs about Fatherless Progeny," in "More Science from an Easy Chair."

[3] Hartland, in "Primitive Paternity," discusses this at great length, and gives a large number of very interesting examples of primitive superstitions and ignorance about conception and births. For further details about the beliefs and customs of the aboriginal Australians see op. cit., vol. i, pp. 52, 85, 150, 237–46, and vol. ii, pp. 275–79.

[4] "Bygone Beliefs" (p. 161), by H. Stanley Redgrove, who, however, regards this Arunta belief as a deviation from the normal evolution. Why is not quite clear, as it seems to be only a more primitive stage than is usually met with.

have a case in which animism might easily develop into a cult resembling phallic worship, while as yet the phallus itself is unconnected with fertility.

In one Red Indian tribe the women believed that the soul of a dying person was capable of impregnating them, and those who desired to become mothers flocked to the bedside of the dying.[1]

Even at a far more advanced stage of culture a kindred belief persists. Thus the Amazons, a mythical nation of female warriors and no men, were fabled to reproduce themselves without male assistance.[2] And, besides the Amazons, there have been traditions of many other nations composed only of women. Of one of these, which lived on the "Isle of Women" in the Chinese Sea, and of another, which inhabited an island off the coast of Sumatra, it was said that the women were fertilized by the wind.

In ancient times there was a widespread notion that women sometimes conceived by the wind. Hiawatha was said to be a son of the west wind; and many other mythical heroes owed their existence to that wind, or to the east wind or the south wind.

Even in comparatively recent times men believed that "certain animals were accustomed to conceive by the wind and the breeze," and argued that therefore procreation by the Spirit of God was not even wonderful![3]

[1] Frazer's "Golden Bough," citing Wilke's "Narrative of U.S. Exploring Expedition," and Hale's "U.S. Exploring Expedition: Ethnography and Philology."

[2] According to some authorities, however, the Amazons did occasionally have intercourse with men. Probably the stories about nations composed entirely of women originated among patrilineally organized communities, who came into contact with more primitive communities whose organization was still matrilineal. Among some of the latter, men occupied very subordinate positions both in the government of the tribe and in the dwellings of their female partners, and the paternity of children was generally extremely doubtful.

[3] E.g., "Divine Institutes" of Lactantius, who describes, in the most crude material terms, the act of procreation as performed by the Holy Ghost. Quotation from Robertson's "Christianity and Mythology," second edition, p. 295, note.

Virgil also noted the stories of mares being often fertilized by the wind:—

Et saepe sine ullis
Conjugiis vento gravidæ, mirabile dictu.[1]

In this connection it is instructive to note that in Mesopotamia and Egypt, where, for hundreds or perhaps thousands of years, the natives have artificially fertilized the date palms by brushing the pollen of the male palm on to the ovaries of the female date, it was only quite recently that they learnt that the process they were helping to carry out was a sexual one. They had empirically discovered that the process was necessary, but up till then had believed that its effect was to prevent some disease—or evil spirit—from shrivelling up the young dates.[2]

Even in England a few years ago it was customary to root up the male hop plants as useless encumbrances, and it was not until numerous experiments[3] had been made that the hop-growers were persuaded to believe that the wind-borne pollen of the male hop was necessary for the full development of the female fruit. They knew that male fructification was necessary if the seed was required to germinate, but they did not realize that it was also necessary if the fruit was to swell. If even in the twentieth century such mistakes could be made as to ignore the necessity for male fructification, what was not possible in the days before physiology had even been dreamt of?

A still more remarkable example of the ancient modes of thought regarding fertilization is to be found in the old custom of "marrying" trees by binding them together. This was supposed to render them more fertile, and may have been purely symbolic, as the custom betrays no

[1] Georgics, iii, 275.
[2] See below for the probable real origin of the custom.
[3] Described in one of the monthly issues of the "Journal of the Board of Agriculture."

physiological knowledge or intention.[1] This and the fertilization of date palms, to which we have already referred, were probably regarded in the same way as the Pathans of Gilgit regarded their ceremony of mixing sprigs of a sacred cedar tree with their wheat grain before they sowed the latter, as a means of increasing the yield of the plant through the services of the spirit of the tree whose assistance was thus invoked.[2] Disease was driven away and fruitfulness increased, they thought, by this good Spirit of Vegetation.

In some parts of Germany the "Yule Straw" was, and perhaps still is, bound round fruit trees "for the purpose of fertilizing them"; the origin of the custom, and of other similar customs to which we have referred, being doubtless connected with sympathetic magic.

By sympathetic magic is meant all those customs by which primitive races attempted to coerce the forces of nature, or the spiritual beings which, in their minds, corresponded to the forces of nature. For example, they believed that if they poured water on the ground the gods or spirits would be compelled to send rain; that if they lit a fire near a crop the sun would be forced to shine upon and warm that crop; and that if they connected their seed grain with anything which contained the spirit of one of the Vegetation Gods, or one of the Spirits of Fertility, that seed would become imbued with fruitfulness.

But, apart from the superstitions of sympathetic magic, myths grew out of the apparent facts of vegetable reproduction.

In some of the oldest stories told about Isis, the goddess has no partner. Osiris has not yet appeared upon the scene, and Isis lives a lonely life among the marshes. There, without any male assistance, she gives birth to a son.

[1] See for examples Frazer's "Golden Bough," first edition, chapter i, p. 60.

[2] Frazer, op. cit., p. 70.

It is probable that the idea behind this story is derived from the apparently immaculate birth of vegetation from seeds. That plants are reproduced by a sexual process was not known to the originators of such myths; and vegetation, it seemed to them, required only moisture for the purpose of reproducing itself. Hence the goddess of fertility conceiving amid the ponds and marshes,[1] and hence too the stories of the first creation taking place on the damp shores of the ocean.[2]

Men eventually began to notice, and to speculate upon, the constantly recurring, and apparently miraculous,[3] death and rebirth of vegetation, the dead seed sown in the womb of the earth and called to life again by the rays of the sun. In the language of the poets, the Earth was the Mother of all things, and the Sun—the Sun-God—was the Father of all things. The poetical language of prophets is soon taken literally, and taught by the priests as describing material facts. Perhaps even in this case the "prophets" and poets meant it literally. Perhaps

[1] Some of the Greek philosophers rationalized the Egyptian myth of Osiris, Isis, and Horus by saying that Osiris (the Nile) covered Isis (the dry land) at flood time every year, and that from their union always sprang Horus, vegetation. The original allegory—if indeed it was an allegory—would, however, be more probably based upon astronomical observations. Natural events, probably misunderstood, were often allegorized: the resultant allegory became a myth; the myth was rationalized, so far as anything was ever rationalized in pre-scientific days; the rationalization was again allegorized; and finally a new myth arose. Doubtless such is the history of many myths. It is not surprising that their ultimate origin can seldom, if ever, be traced with any certainty.

[2] E.g., in the old Babylonian story life was first created where the rivers of Mesopotamia meet the sea. Even Anaximander, one of the earliest Greek philosophers, who lived at the beginning of the sixth century B.C., and whose cosmological theory resembles remarkably closely the present theory of evolution, also surmised that life began when moisture first started to evaporate off the surface of the earth; and Anaxagoras, in the middle of the fifth century B.C., also taught that the first germs came to life in the slime caused by a mixture of earth and water. It is not improbable that the development of organic life out of inorganic matter took place under some such conditions; but the myth-makers thought, not of primitive protoplasm, but of highly organized creatures. Shakespeare had evidently heard of these misconceptions, as in "Antony and Cleopatra" (act ii, scene vii) he makes Lepidus say: "Your serpent of Egypt is bred now out of your mud by the operation of your sun: so is your crocodile."

[3] Miraculous because apparently causeless.

—even probably—they did regard Earth as a real mother, and the Sun as a real father.[1]

That their knowledge of nature was very limited we have many proofs, and we need not be surprised that this was so. The ancient Egyptians, for example, had many very curious beliefs about reproduction. They thought that there were no female scarabs,[2] and that the males reproduced their kind by depositing their seed in balls of dung, whence in due time young scarabs were produced.[3]

On the other hand, they believed that there were no male vultures, and that consequently the female vultures produced their young parthenogenetically. Of the methods by which some other animals conceived and brought

[1] The oldest Greek cosmology related that the first men, Cyclops, Titans, and Hundred-handed monsters, were the fruit of unions between Ouranos (the Sky) and the Earth (rain drops impregnating the soil). Another very old, and a more pleasing, cosmological myth relates that the first human beings were hermaphrodites, who, as a punishment for rebelling against the gods, were divided each into their male and female halves. Since then each male and each female soul seeks its other half—not merely its mate, but part of itself. When rightly found, its union with its other half leads to bliss eternal; when wrongly united, to irreconcilable incompatibilities.

[2] The curiously marked beetle of which so many metal imitations are sold in Egypt as charms even to-day.

[3] The Egyptian superstition may have originated partly in observations of the behaviour of another beetle whose female lays her eggs in dung, which she rolls into a large ball and pushes backward with her hind legs until she finds—with difficulty, as she is always moving backward—a hole in which to hide it. Most of these curious beliefs are based upon misinterpreted observations of facts. Thus many people have believed that certain insects, which provide for their young by laying their eggs in the benumbed bodies of caterpillars and grubs of other species which they have stung, have no children of their own, and that their race is perpetuated by the metamorphosis of the alien caterpillar or grub. The mason-wasp, for example, constructs a cell of mud in which it places the living but paralysed caterpillar which it has stung. It lays its eggs in this apparent corpse, and eventually those eggs are hatched and the young wasp grubs feed on the still living tissues of their parents' victim. When the grubs develop into fully-formed wasps and issue from the cells, uninstructed observers believe that the alien caterpillar has come to life again in a new form. In Central Africa the natives account for this apparent fact by relating that the first mason-wasp was, for services rendered to mankind, given by God the privilege of not having to beget his own children—a process presumably considered troublesome, owing to the difficulties of providing for their nourishment and education!—and allowed to provide himself with successors in this strange manner.

forth their young as strange, or even stranger, tales are told.[1]

Conception, birth, and growth are all wonderful processes. Scientific study has revealed to moderns some of their secrets. The scientific method is to weigh, to measure, to compare, and to record, and never to accept guesses as facts.

The ancient method—with a few notable exceptions—was unscientific. Guesses, and the more wonderful the more acceptable, were received as facts; and so these wonderful processes were thought more wonderful still.

The Alchemists, postulating an unwarrantable analogy between inorganic matter and organic life, believed that their art consisted in joining male to female. For example, lead was considered to be male and orpiment to be female, so by their conjunction something valuable, perhaps gold or even the Philosopher's Stone itself, might be produced.

The affinity for each other of certain elements—a real fact which the Alchemists had noticed—was explained as due to their opposite sexes. Mercury (quicksilver), which has remarkably strong affinities for some other elements, was much discussed in this respect.[2]

Some said that it was male, others that it was female. Eventually it seems to have been thought that it was itself hermaphrodite, the product of two substances themselves respectively male and female, and the parent of all other substances.[3]

[1] Notably of weasels, peacocks, partridges, ibises, and crocodiles some curious but very coarse stories were told. The superstition about the peafowl appears to have been credited in quite recent times, even in the British Isles.

[2] The difficulty of extracting the generative seed from a metal was discussed at length. Its extraction was a task which might "well tax the ingenuity of the most experienced philosopher," as it was diffused throughout the metal instead of being separate, as in the case of animals and vegetables. So we are informed by Eirenæus Philalethes in "The Metamorphoses of Metals" (quoted in "Bygone Beliefs," by H. Stanley Redgrove).

[3] Mercury, as is well known, has a great affinity for gold, and is used for the extraction of this metal from refractory ores and from tailings

All things were divided by these speculators into male and female classes; water and fire were male, earth and air female. They hoped artificially to bring about generative processes which they thought were actually going on all the time in hidden places out of the sight of man.[1]

A curious sidelight is thrown upon the then current ideas of animal generation in the course of a discussion between two of these Alchemists as to how it was that, when gold was produced—as, according to their erroneous theory, it actually was produced—by the union of quicksilver and sulphur, nothing of the substance of the sulphur could afterwards be detected in the gold. One Bernard Trevisanus explains this alleged fact by quoting Aristotle's[2] opinion that "in a human embryo, when it is conceived in the womb, there remains nothing of the father's seed.....but the seed of the man doth only coagulate the menstrual blood of the woman."[3]

The Alchemists were, comparatively speaking, men of a scientific habit of thought. All men of their day had the strangest ideas about the generative forces of nature.

The occurrence of spontaneous generation was believed in by nearly all men until quite recently, and in the early centuries of the Christian era the theory was sometimes brought forward to explain the otherwise apparently unaccountable existence, not only of minute organisms, but of large mammals. St. Augustine, in his "City of God," describes the peopling of some islands with animals spontaneously generated; and even much later than St.

which cannot be made to yield up any more of their gold by other processes. This affinity for gold gave it special interest in the eyes of the Alchemists—and of other people.

[1] Exhausted mines used to be closed down and sealed, so that, out of the sight of men, nature might generate more metals. See chapter x, "The Phallic Element in Alchemical Doctrine," in "Bygone Beliefs," by H. Stanley Redgrove.

[2] Really a pseudo-Aristotle.

[3] See Redgrove, op. cit., pp. 175–76, citing Edward Kelly's "The Stone of the Philosophers," pp. 206–7.

Augustine's day men were convinced that such events were of occasional, if not indeed of frequent, occurrence.[1]

As regards smaller organisms, we all know how the mites in cheese, and the still smaller organisms of putrefaction, were believed, until quite recently, to arise spontaneously in suitable matter.

It was not until towards the end of the eighteenth century that the true facts about the fertilization of queen bees were discovered by a Frenchman, who examined a young queen on her return to the hive after her nuptial flight and found indisputable evidence of what had lately occurred to her. Until then, and even for some time after then, parthenogenesis and many much stranger theories were held as explanations of the production of bee grubs.

In Roman times the supposed capacity of the virgin female bee for producing large numbers of young caused bees to be regarded as emblems of chastity, and it was for long considered dangerous for unchaste persons to approach a beehive, lest the outraged inhabitants should sting him or her to death.

Until less than a century ago it was firmly believed by most people who interested themselves in such matters that eels were metamorphosed hairs dropped into ponds from the tails of horses.[2]

Even as late as the Middle Ages illegitimate children were often said—and, much more wonderful, believed—to have been born without the intervention of a male parent, but from the effects of a purely spiritual connection with "Incubi."[3]

[1] Spontaneous generation, or several new local creations, were postulated to explain the repeopling of remote islands after the Flood.

[2] The well-known belief, which also lasted until quite recent times, even if it does not still exist in some places, that "barnacle" geese spring from barnacles, is of a kindred nature, but perhaps rather remote from our present subject.

[3] These curious beings were demons seen only at night and in dreams. During the persecutions for witchcraft, which took place continuously throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many old women were accused of having had sexual commerce with the Devil, found guilty

And later still men have been sufficiently credulous to credit the tales of girls who asserted that their infants were the result of bathing in the same river as, though afar off from, men whose seed was supposed to have floated down stream and impregnated them.[1]

It is said that the original reason why men who were forbidden by their religion to eat the flesh of animals, or even to eat eggs, were allowed to eat fish was that the latter were supposed not to procreate their kind by the conjunction of the sexes, and therefore not to possess souls! The Buddhist may eat fish, though he may eat no other flesh. The Catholic (who may have inherited his modified custom through Gnostic sources from Buddhism) is allowed to eat fish on fast days, when he may not eat flesh.

These facts may at first sight appear to have no bearing upon the question under discussion, but they are illuminating for us, as they show that even the most elementary physiological facts of this kind are very easily misunderstood or overlooked until their real nature is explained by scientific observers, and that in very primitive times myths could very easily arise which—as is the case with all myths—would survive long after the natural course of events was fully understood by most men.

The inhabitants of Asia Minor, Syria, Babylonia, and Egypt were, in the first century of our era, no longer so ignorant as the Queenslanders referred to above. They were comparatively highly civilized races, but they inherited myths which arose in a transitional period. They

of that heinous offence, and burnt to death. In the Middle Ages men were sometimes said to have been begotten by the Devil, and detailed accounts of such events were related by witnesses who pretended, on their oaths in ecclesiastical courts, to have personal cognizance of the facts connected with their conceptions. Our Saxon ancestors believed that the celebrated magician Merlin, who lived at the time of King Arthur, was born of a virgin and spiritually conceived by Satan.

[1] See vol. ix of the quarterly journal of the Folk-Lore Society for the story of a woman who believed that her sister's illegitimate child had been conceived merely by the gaze of a dark-eyed stranger, supposed to be a foreigner.

themselves would not invent entirely new myths of that kind, but they would accept, repeat, and re-apply old myths invented by their less well-informed ancestors.

Many of them regarded these stories with the same kind of affection as orthodox religious people to-day feel for their creeds, and some—like certain of the latter, as we shall see hereafter—were ready to do a considerable amount of editing so as to bring their old beliefs more or less into line with new ideas. The philosophers continually rationalized the old stories, explaining them away as allegories; but the unphilosophical reversed that process, and turned the metaphors of poets into what they regarded as history and what we call myths.

Thus it was that the mystical doctrines of the Gnostics gradually became materialized so as to correspond with the pagan stories, and so as to compete with the latter for popular favour.

If we desire, as fully as is possible at this distance of time, to comprehend the mental atmosphere in which this Virgin Birth story arose, we must study—so far as the fragmentary records which have come down to these days permit—the doctrines of the Gnostic philosophers and theologians who flourished in and before the second century A.D. That atmosphere is indeed so different from our own that it is scarcely possible for modern men fully to appreciate the mental processes of those in whose minds the various doctrines took shape; and, in any case, here we can only very briefly refer to a few of the ideas held by the various theosophical speculators who called themselves Gnostics.

That those ideas influenced at least one of the evangelists is undoubted; that they played an important part in the evolution of the Incarnation doctrine is almost as certain.

In the next chapter we will consider the Gnostic conceptions of Christ.

Chapter V

SPIRITUAL VIRGIN BIRTHS—GNOSTIC DOCTRINES

The Virgin Birth story can be traced along another line of evolution besides that, already considered, of the pagan stories about their men-gods. Among its ancestors it numbered Gnosticism.

According to the mystic theosophy of the Gnostics, the abstractions which they regarded as spiritual beings—emanations in the first or subsequent generation from the Supreme—were grouped together in pairs ("syzygies"), of which one partner was looked upon as male, the other as female.[1]

The Virgin Birth, in Gnostic doctrine, took place when Sophia (Wisdom), desirous of emulating the "alone-begetting"[2] Supreme, gave birth, without the connivance of her syzygy partner, to a mystic spiritual being.

This mystic spiritual being, pre-existing in a far-off heaven, was the "æon" Jesus. The syzygy, partner and

[1] It must be remembered that we are now dealing with mystic processes and spiritual beings, not with physical matters.

[2] The title "only begotten Son" is derived, by a process of degeneration rather than of evolution, from the title "alone begotten Son." The Supreme God alone and without partner gives rise to emanations which are his "alone begotten" children. The title was generally used in this sense, but it was also occasionally used to imply special importance, though not necessarily uniqueness. Thus Persephone was spoken of as the "only begotten" daughter of Zeus, though "only begotten" could in this case only mean "the principal" daughter of Zeus, as the latter was certainly credited with being the parent of many other daughters, and as he was not said to have "alone begotten" her. (Persephone was said to be the daughter of Demeter by Zeus, as well as the mother of Zagreus by Zeus. Demeter and Persephone were sometimes regarded as identical. Zagreus was torn in pieces and eaten, but his heart was rescued from his murderers, and eventually swallowed by Zeus. He was then reborn as Dionysos from the union of Zeus and Semele. There are other variants of the myth.)

spouse, of Sophia was Christos, another spiritual being but—owing to the conceit and ambition of Sophia—not the father of Jesus.

That, according to some of the Gnostics, is the Virgin Birth story. Whether it existed in that form in pre-Gospel Christian days cannot, in our present state of knowledge, be definitely decided. So many Gnostic books were destroyed by the triumphant Catholics, when Catholic Christianity became the State-established religion of the Roman empire, that our knowledge of Gnosticism is too scanty for us to determine with certainty whether this form of their theosophical doctrine was evolved from the Gospel birth story, or the latter evolved from the theosophical doctrine. But the latter is the more probable, and at any rate both sets of ideas seem to have influenced each other and been roughly combined in the final doctrine. Moreover, even if the names of the æons, Jesus and Christ, were post-Gospel, the idea of the alone-begetting virgin Sophia was certainly pre-Gospel.

When materialists related that the Logos ("The Word") "was made flesh," they took one of the abstractions which Gnostics had already personified as a divine spiritual being, and further transformed it into a material human being.[1] The process by which this was done is briefly but clearly shown in the first fourteen verses of the Gospel according to St. John. In this Gospel there is, as we have noticed before, no Virgin Birth story. Jesus is "The Word" mysteriously "made flesh."

In Hellenistic Egypt, the centre of Gnosticism, there

[1] The Logos was the Gnostic parallel to the Indian Vach, Oum, or Prana, and the Persian Honover. All of these were spiritual beings personifying the Word or the Reason of the Supreme Being from whom they emanated. See Milman's "History of Christianity," vol. i, pp. 72–5, and notes.

Lao Tzu (about 600 B.C.) had taught that "primordial Reason" had created the world; and in many ancient philosophic systems the creation of the world and all dealings with it were said to have been delegated by the ineffable Supreme Being to such a subordinate emanation from himself as his Word or his Reason.

was another pre-Christian cult which introduced a virgin into its rites.

This maiden, or virgin, was Korē, who was said to have given birth to the "alone-begotten" Dusarēs. In celebrating this virgin's rites at Alexandria, and also at Petra in Arabia, her worshippers—so the orthodox Christian bishop, Epiphanius, informs us—used to carry up from an underground crypt a naked wooden image marked with crosses[1] of gold. This image they carried round the temple with great rejoicings, and then returned to its vault, thus celebrating the mystic resurrection or regeneration of the celestial æon.

This "Virgin of the World" (Korē Kosmou) was, according to the Egyptian theosophists, a female divinity —the alone-begotten of the Supreme God—who, in obedience to his command, brought forth everything which is upon the earth or above the earth or under the earth.[2] She was, in fact, Nature, who had been barren until by the word of God she conceived all that is in heaven above, on the earth itself, and in the waters below. She seems eventually to have been identified with the goddess Isis.[3]

Thus in Egypt the virgin mother idea was familiar both in mysticism and ritual as well as in the more material mythologies. To the initiates the idea symbolized a spiritual process, but by the general body of worshippers the idea was always, or gradually became, materialized.

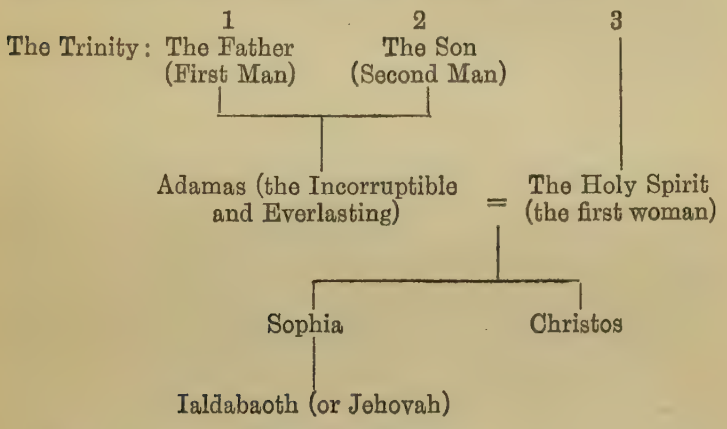
[1] The cross referred to being presumably the Tau, or symbol of life.

[2] See Mead's "Thrice Greatest Hermes," vol. iii, pp. 93–134, for text of two excerpts called "The Virgin of the World," being the instruction given by Isis to Horus about the creation of the world—a very curious and interesting cosmology.

[3] Perhaps by the Gnostics the "Virgin of the World" was identified with Sophia (Wisdom), the female emanation from the Supreme God. Wisdom had existed from the beginning of time (see Proverbs viii, especially verses 22–30, and compare with the beginning of the Gospel according to St. John for a similar statement about the kindred emanation—the Logos). Sophia was, as we have seen above, also said to have given birth to a son by parthenogenesis. According to some sects, she continually did so, and thus became, like the Korē Kosmou, the Mother of all things; hence the Virgin of the World.

In the more primitive and spiritual theosophy of some Gnostic systems Jesus and Christ were clearly distinguished.

Christ was said to have been born from the "First Woman"—the Holy Spirit of their Trinity. Sophia[1] was born from her left side, Christ from her right side. Thus Christ, or the Christ Spirit—for we are now still dealing with celestial and spiritual beings, and not with persons of flesh and blood—had existed from almost the beginning of all time, and was not identical with "The Son." The relationship of Christ to the Trinity of these Gnostics can best be shown by a genealogical tree, as follows[2]:—



With this Trinity we cannot deal more fully now. At

[1] Sophia = Wisdom.

[2] The Father and the Son together form Adamas, and from the union of Adamas with the Holy Spirit spring Sophia and Christos. From Sophia alone, by parthenogenesis, is born Ialdabaoth, or Jehovah. This Jehovah, the Creator or Demiurge, boasts that he is God the Father, and is rebuked by his scandalized mother Sophia, who reminds him of the "First Man" and "Second Man," who are together the Supreme God. Jehovah then determines to create man in his own image and a new world of his own, over which he might rule exempt from the overlordship of the Supreme God. This theogony is, of course, an attempt made by Jewish Gnostics to reconcile the ideas of an Ineffable Supreme God and of the anthropomorphic Jehovah, and to explain the existence of evil by postulating an inferior deity who ruled over the world uncontrolled by the perfect but immensely remote Absolute.

present it suffices to note that this doctrine differs from the other and later Gnostic doctrine—that of the descent of Sophia, in the form of a dove, upon the head of the man Jesus, causing the latter to be filled with the Christ Spirit, and thus become "*The* Christ." According to yet another Gnostic doctrine, both Sophia *and* Christos descended into Jesus at the time of his baptism. In some versions of this latter story, Christos, "before the descent of Jesus through the seven planes or spheres,"[1] himself descends and prepares the Virgin Mary to receive him.

Doubtless (so far as Gnostic Christians, if not indeed so far as all Christians, were concerned) it was on some such lines as these that the later story of the Virgin Birth was evolved out of the earlier story of the descent of the Christ Spirit to inspire the grown-up prophet, Jesus,[2] at his baptism.

According to another, uncanonical, account of the Incarnation, the pre-existing Lord Christ, who had hitherto lived in the seventh heaven with the saints of God, the Holy Spirit, and "The Most High the Father of my Lord," was commanded by the latter to descend to the world, and to take upon himself the appearance of "the angels of the firmament," so that none should recognize him. In accordance with these commands, Christ descended through the six heavens. In the sixth he was recognized and worshipped, but in the lower five he took the form of the angels who respectively inhabited each, and thus passed through unknown. The story goes on to relate that the Virgin Mary was found by Joseph to be with child. We are not told how she became with child, but only that Joseph, after the "angel of the Spirit" had appeared to him, married her and said nothing to anybody. Two months after his marriage, when he and his wife were alone, Mary suddenly "looked with her eyes and saw a small babe, and she was astonied. And after

[1] That is to say, from the seventh heaven. [2] = The æon, Jeu?

she had been astonied, her womb was found as formerly before she had conceived."[1]

The neighbours, it appears, were also astonished; not only because Mary had borne a child only two months after marriage, but because no midwife had attended her, nor had any cries of pain been heard. The child, however, suckles the breast of his mother like an ordinary child, and no one knows of his miraculous origin.[2] Neither is that miraculous origin suspected by any one while he lives on earth or when he is crucified.[3]

Now, this account[4] of the Incarnation seems to supply the link between the Gnostic idea of a spiritual being who appears upon earth only as a phantasm, and the Gospel description of a human child begotten by the Holy Spirit of God.

The child in this account is not really born of Mary, but is only a visionary child who appears to her, and who acts as her child. The conception is imaginary and the child is imaginary, but Joseph and Mary are introduced into the Gnostic story, and in this way the Gnostic and the Gospel stories are roughly combined, or the Gnostic story grows into the Gospel story.

Thus the growth of the doctrine might possibly have proceeded on some such lines as the following:—

[1] Charles's translation of the "Ascension of Isaiah," p. 76.

[2] Except, presumably, Joseph and Mary themselves; but this is not clear. Perhaps, as in the Gospel story, Joseph and Mary—even after all these extraordinary events—believe the child to be quite ordinary.

[3] Charles, op. cit., pp. 76–82.

[4] The "Ascension of Isaiah" purports to record what the prophet Isaiah sees when he is translated, during his lifetime, to the seventh heaven. There he hears God order his Son to descend, and then Isaiah sees him descend and enter the household of Joseph and Mary. Though attributed to the Isaiah who had lived about 750 B.C., the book could not really have been written until about the second century A.D., at which time it was accepted by uncritical Gnostics as a genuine ascension to heaven, or vision, of the prophet. To be so accepted the "prophecy" must have incorporated an account of something which was believed to have happened; so this story as given above was evidently current about the same time as the Gospels were published, or even earlier. Note, too, that the belief in Jesus's spiritual origin is believed not to have been formed until after the crucifixion—i.e., it was a consequence not of his birth, but of his resurrection.

First, the Gnostic conception of a pre-existing being—an æon—who comes to earth in the temporarily assumed shape of a man.

Secondly, a man, born in the ordinary way, who is differentiated from other men by the descent into him of the Holy Spirit—at first identified with the above spiritual being—at his baptism.

Thirdly, the differentiation is supposed to have taken place while he is yet in the womb of his mother; and,

Fourthly, he is actually conceived by the Spirit who is now identified with God.

All these ideas are to be found implicitly in various passages of the Gospels, and explicitly in other writings of the same period.

The growth from the first to the last could be very gradual, though the first and the last are such entirely different and uncombinable conceptions. In the process of evolution a purely spiritual conception becomes a grossly materialistic idea. The oriental sage invented the one; the oriental savage accepted the other.

The Gospel stories, whatever their variations in detail, were identical in their main feature, and that main feature—the virgin birth of a divine being—was familiar to all men.

The Gnostic doctrines, on the other hand, were not only too refined and too vague to interest the uneducated general public, but were also too numerous. Each Gnostic sect seems to have had its own variation. In the Apocryphal "Gospel to the Hebrews" (which was almost certainly older than any of our Canonical Gospels) Jesus speaks of "my *mother*, the Holy Spirit"; an expression which can be interpreted only by Gnostic doctrine.[1]

In the "Pistis Sophia," a recently recovered Gnostic work, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is described as relating

[1] Except in the orthodox doctrine ("conceived by the Holy Ghost"), which makes the Holy Ghost father of Jesus, the Holy Spirit where personalized was usually regarded as feminine.

how a stranger visited the child Jesus, how they embraced, and how the two—Jesus and the stranger—coalesced into one body and "became one." It was thus that Jesus, according to some of these very early Gnostic Christians, became the Christ by the blending of his human body with the spiritual body of the Good Spirit (or Logos).

We have already noticed the doctrine of the Gnostics that the Christ Spirit entered into Jesus when it descended in the form of a dove at his baptism.

The Cerinthians, one of the earliest Gnostic sects, if not the very earliest, of whom we have any knowledge, also held this doctrine.

The Basilideans, another numerically very important Gnostic Christian sect, held a similar doctrine.

The Manichæans, a much later and only semi-Christian sect, evidently inherited this part of their doctrines from one of these Gnostic sects, as they believed that Jesus descended from heaven in the form of a man about thirty years of age. His body was illusory, as he was, in reality, a purely spiritual being; and in the same way the dove (Holy Spirit) which descended upon him, or rather into him, at his baptism, was also an illusion. Manes, the founder of this sect, described the Virgin Birth story as a fable which had grown up around the imaginary figure of this pre-existing spirit Jesus, and drew attention to the fact that no first-hand witness gave evidence of its occurrence.

A dove was the symbol of Sophia, and Sophia was frequently spoken of as "the Holy Dove."

From the doctrine that Jesus had received the Holy Spirit at his baptism is easily evolved the doctrine that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit before birth; and legends about that conception would, in those days and in that part of the world, soon arise when once the doctrine was formulated. There was, as we have already seen, no lack of examples to draw upon when speculating about the manner of this conception.

The Ebionites, too, who were—though not at first Gnostics—the earliest or one of the earliest of all the Christian sects, regarded Jesus as a man, born in the ordinary way, who became an inspired prophet at his baptism.

It was perhaps these Ebionites who eventually founded the so-called Petrine or gospel form of Christianity, against which Paul seems always to be in opposition. These Ebionites were probably eventually absorbed into Gnosticism, and, as Gnostics, suppressed when the Catholic Church was placed in power by Constantine.

Other Gnostic sects taught yet other doctrines about the divinity of Jesus.

Some, like the so-called Carpocratians, elaborated a theory, based upon the re-incarnation doctrine in which Hindus and Buddhists[1] still believe, that Jesus was born in the ordinary course of nature from Joseph and Mary, but was possessed of a soul which had, in former lives, attained to exceptional virtue, and so been enabled to remember all that it had seen when last re-absorbed into the Universal Mind (the Ineffable Father). Other souls, they said, had attained to similar virtue, and thus obtained for their possessors the power of performing miracles.

Some of the Gnostics taught that every man would become a "Christ"—one anointed with the "ineffable chrism"—if only he could part with his physical nature and retain his spiritual nature. Others besides Jesus—though they were few and far between—had, so they taught, become Christs, reborn or risen from the thrall of dead matter.

Valentinus, the second-century Gnostic, writing to a friend, says that "it was by his unremitting self-denial in all things that Jesus attained to God-ship.....,"[2] and goes

[1] In Thibet it is believed that the soul of the Buddha is constantly reborn. As soon as one Hutukhtu, or living Buddha, dies, another is born.

[2] Quotation taken from "Fragments of a Faith Forgotten," by G. R. S. Mead.

on to give details, which sound very strange and rather coarse to our modern ears, of his methods of subjugating the flesh.[1]

This conception is, in slightly altered terms, expressed by the Indian mystics, and is the basic idea for the most rigid forms of asceticism, designed to starve the physical nature to death.

By "Yoga," a course of austerities and subjective contemplation, men, they say, may become "Yogi," spiritual beings denuded of their physical natures. For thousands of years this doctrine has been taught in India, and first-century Gnostics believed and taught something almost identical with it.[2] It has, of course, been often pushed to unwarrantable and foolish extremes, and become a superstition and an obsession; but it is based on a fact which is hardly disputable—namely, that man attains to the highest spiritual standard only by renouncing the pomps and vanities of the world, and by forgetting, in his search for knowledge and wisdom, all love of self. That truth seems a better thing to teach men than the doctrine that a man could only become "god-like" by a miracle which distinguished him from other men. That idea seems more worthy of study than metaphysical subtleties about methods of Divine conception.[3] The endeavour for self-improvement by self-sacrifice is a nobler thing than the belief that benefits are to be attained through the materialization of the spiritual.

[1] In Russia—certainly up till the outbreak of the Great War, and perhaps even now—there were sects which believed that all their members had, by a course of austerities, self-denials, and devotion to others, attained to Christhood. They are an interesting example of the survival of once popular beliefs.

[2] After the conquests of Alexander the Great there was free trade in ideas and theories between India, Persia, and Egypt.

[3] These curious theories about the Incarnation and about the nature or natures (human and divine) of Christ were chiefly elaborated during the great Trinitarian controversy in the fourth century, and became most prominent when the Catholic sect of Christians rose to power and began to suppress, as heretics, all the other sects of Christians. As they are more intimately connected with the Trinity than with the Virgin Birth doctrine, they will not now be considered.

The idea of God begetting a son was not always materialistic. Philo and philosophers of his school spoke of Wisdom (Sophia) receiving the seed of God, and thence bringing forth her only and well-begotten son, the Logos. This was a poetical or metaphorical conception of the creation of an abstract virtue. It was only by grosser minds that the "son" came to be considered as a person and the process as physical.[1]

It is only by force of habit that modern Christians can still accept the grossly material myth instead of the poetical conception from which it originally sprang; and among those Christians who, desiring a more rational basis for their beliefs, have studied the origin of this doctrine, but very few, if any, can be found who still believe in it. This fact will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.[2] Meanwhile we have yet to consider some of the minor details of the two conflicting accounts given in our Bibles of this stupendous miracle.

[1] Philo, the Jew, lived at Alexandria in the first half of the first century A.D. He was a great writer on theology—a blend of Judaism and of Greek philosophy which was one form of Gnosticism—but knew nothing of Christianity. The only begotten son of whom he wrote was the Logos, not yet identified with a Jesus or a Christ.

[2] See Chapter VII.

Chapter VI

DETAILS OF THE TWO GOSPEL STORIES

Before we conclude our survey of the Virgin Birth story, we must return yet again to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and notice how not only the idea itself of a Virgin Birth, but also all the details of the two stories, were mythopœic conceptions commonly current in the East. The Massacre of the Innocents, the birth in a stable or cave, the cradling in a manger, and even the journey of the God's parents for the purpose of paying their taxes, were stories told in connection with many pre-Christian cults—stories so intimately connected in people's minds with the miraculous birth of god-men that they were transferred in turn to all, or at any rate to most, of the religious histories of those times. Let us first examine the story of "The Massacre of the Innocents."

This story of Herod being told that a child, who was to be King of the Jews, had been born in Bethlehem of Judæa, and of his slaying all the children of two years old and under, is related only by the author of the second chapter of Matthew. Luke gives an entirely contradictory version of the movements of Joseph and Mary, and entirely different reasons for those movements. There is, as we have before noticed,[1] no historical evidence of such a massacre having been ordered or having taken place. Jewish historians have no record of such an event, and in debates with Christians have always denied the possibility of its unrecorded occurrence. Even as early as the days of Origen, the Jews in their disputes with the Christians used to point out the unhistoricity of this story;

[1] Page 90.

and in more modern times, when the study of the resemblances of different religions—the science of comparative religion—began to be undertaken, attention has frequently been called to its numerous parallels in mythical and legendary histories.

For example, in the Krishna myth King Kansa murders, as soon as they are born, all the male children of Krishna's mother, Devaki; and Krishna is preserved only by a miracle, and exchanged for the daughter of a peasant. A voice from heaven had warned King Kansa that he would be slain by a son of his sister Devaki; and he had already slain six of her children before Krishna, the man-god, was born.

Again, in the Cyrus legend Astyages, the king of the Medes, dreams that his daughter will give birth to a child who will reign in his stead, and orders Harpagus to kill the infant as soon as it is born. Harpagus, unwilling to commit so bloody an act with his own hands, delegates the task to a cowherd. The cowherd's wife having just given birth to a still-born child, the body of the latter is palmed off as that of the infant Cyrus, who is really brought up by the cowherd as his own son, and eventually comes to the throne.[1]

According to an old Arab story about Abraham, the latter narrowly escapes death when King Nemrod orders all male children to be put to death because the astrologers have foretold that a child is to be born who will destroy both the king himself and the idols of all nations.

Similar stories are told of Cypselus, despot of Corinth, and of Telephus, the mythical son of Hercules and Auge. And, apart from such elaborate myths and legends of escape from death in early infancy, there are numerous other accounts, less elaborate, of the dangers to which the infant god or hero is exposed immediately after his birth. Zeus himself is saved only by a trick from death at the

[1] Herodotus, book i.

hands, or rather in the mouth, of his father, Cronus. Romulus and Remus, Sargon, Æsculapius, Attis, Dionysos, Semiramis, and many other mythical personages, had such stories told about them.[1] All, or almost all, the gods of mythology have had to be saved in their infancy from such perils. The attempt of a wicked king to kill the mother of the god or the newly-born god himself is a commonplace theme of most religious myths of a man-god, and the reason usually given for this attempt is that the king hears from soothsayers or from an oracle that a child has been, or is to be, born who will become king after him.[2] To escape the peril the child and his mother go on a journey, or the child is in some way concealed.

The form of the legend best known to most of us is that found in the first two chapters of Exodus. In this story Pharaoh orders two Hebrew midwives to slay all the male children who are born to the Israelites; but he orders this not, as in the typical myth, because he fears a personal rival, but because the Israelites are becoming too numerous. As his orders are not carried out,[3] he next tells his own people—the Egyptians themselves—to slay all the male children of the Israelites, and Moses escapes this fate only by being floated down the river, whence he is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter.

(Substitute Euphrates for Nile, and we have the similar story told about Sargon.)

In Egypt the myth was exceedingly old. That strange hippopotamus-shaped goddess whose statues we can still see in that country had, as her chief claim to veneration, the credit of protecting Isis, just before she gave birth to Horus, from Set Typhon, who wished to murder her.

It is said by some of those who seek the origin of all myths in primitive astronomical observations that this

[1] See "Christianity and Mythology," by J. M. Robertson, second edition, pp. 182–87.

[2] Further examples will be given later.

[3] Which is hardly surprising, considering the number and the nationality of the executioners he proposes to use!

story sprang from an allegory of the disappearance in the morning of all the stars save one—the great Sun itself, the sole survivor of the massacre. But more probably the legends arose from the necessity for explaining why so little was known of the birth and infancy of one who was so superior to all other men, and for shedding romance round the beginnings of his history.

It is not suggested that the story in Matthew was necessarily taken deliberately from any one of the above-quoted myths and legends; but as a similar story is told of so many mythical beings, and of so many legendary personages, its repetition in the Gospel story, unsupported by any other writers—Christian or pagan—and contradicted as it indirectly is by Luke, is far more suggestive of a myth than of an actual historical occurrence known to no other historian.

In fiction, plots familiar to all are continually repeated without any conscious plagiarism on the part of the authors. History does not so often and so closely repeat itself. It is, however, not easy to exonerate Luke from a charge of conscious plagiarism. If we turn to his story of the "taxing" under Cæsar Augustus,[1] we find a tale which resembles closely a myth of much earlier date about the popular Indian man-god, Krishna.

Krishna, immediately after his birth, had been—so as to save him from being murdered by his uncle, King Kansa—placed in the charge of a cowherd Nanda and his wife, whose daughter had been substituted for the Divine child. Shortly after the infant Krishna had been placed in his charge, the foster-father Nanda had to journey to Mathura to pay his taxes, and while he is away Krishna has a narrow escape from death. But the remarkable thing is that Luke, the only recorder of this Gospel taxation story, gives other details resembling the Indian pre-Christian myths. The story about the birth of Elizabeth's son John

[1] Luke ii, 1-5.

(the Baptist), cousin of Jesus, corresponds with the story in the Krishna myth about the birth of the child of Nanda and his wife Yasoda, and also corresponds with the story of Ananda, the cousin of the Buddha, who was born at the same time as Gautama, the Buddha, himself.[1]

We have already seen that the "taxation" or census story is unhistorical, and we can only surmise why it was ever introduced. For an author who was not averse to romance, here was a theme eminently suitable. It had already been used in a similar connection; and, though probably it was known so far West to only a few of the learned, there is no improbability about its being borrowed by a writer who was a man of letters. The unpopular census was still remembered; and its date, so the author supposed, was somewhere about the correct time for the story.

When we come to the next detail we wish to examine —the birth of the child in a stable (?) and his being laid in a manger—we find we are dealing with an episode that forms part of a very large number of ancient legends and myths. In the first place, it should be noticed that Luke, our only canonical authority for this episode, does not actually mention a stable. He says that Mary "brought forth her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling-clothes, and laid him in a manger: because there was no room for them in the inn."[2] The stable of tradition may have been inferred from the presence of a manger, and from the statement that there was no room in the inn, which implies that the birth took place in some outbuilding or adjunct of the caravanserai; or it may have become part of that tradition through the influence of the "Apocryphal" Gospels, in several of which the birth of

[1] See "Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists," by Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy, pp. 219-21, and Robertson's "Christianity and Mythology," p. 240 (second edition)—the former for a short account of this part of the Krishna myth; the latter for a discussion of the Ananda and John the Baptist parallel.

[2] Luke ii, 7.

Jesus is said to have taken place in a stable, or in a cave used as a stable, or in a cave not so used.

In one which bore the name of Matthew, and is now known as the "Gospel of the pseudo-Matthew," it is written: "Now, on the third day after the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the most blessed Mary went out of the cave, and, entering a stable, put her child in a manger, and the ox and the ass adored him." This is the scene depicted in many sacred pictures of the Holy Family still to be seen in various art galleries. Doubtless, in the process of toning down the too flagrantly mythological elements of the story, the adoration of the ox and of the ass would first be eliminated, and the cave would eventually suffer a like fate, leaving only the stable in tradition and the manger in the text. But that the cave tradition persisted for a very long time is certain.

In the dramatic representation of the Gospel story which certainly took place in the fifth century,[1] and almost as certainly took place during three or four of the preceding Christian centuries, the birth was shown as taking place in a cave. These dramatic representations closely resembled the older pagan "mystery" plays, in which, so the mythological school of commentators believe, the story had its origin.[2]

Moreover, a cave at Bethlehem was, and perhaps still is, shown as the birthplace of Christ; and this very same cave is said by early Christian writers to have been formerly used for the worship of Tammuz, another man-god whose cult was widely spread in Western Asia at the time when Christianity first arose. This cave was apparently

[1] Witness: St. Proclus, Patriarch of Constantinople 432–46 A.D. Similar religious dramas were acted by monks during the Middle Ages throughout Christendom. In England such performances were frequent. Chester and Coventry were celebrated for their mystery plays. Many of the episodes were founded upon the "Apocryphal" Gospels.

[2] Similar dramatic representations were held in honour of Krishna's birth in a cow-shed. According to the Krishna myth, the god was actually born in a prison, but thence immediately transferred to his cow-herd foster parents. For the purpose of the dramatic unities, however, the birth was also made to take place in a cowshed.

regarded as a holy spot by pre-Christian pagans, and as such—when Christianity became dominant—would naturally be appropriated for the purposes of the new cult.[1]

Caves might be, and undoubtedly often were, used as stables, so that there is nothing inherently incompatible in both forms of the tradition. The fact that Luke does not mention the word "stable," and that the oldest and commonest form of the tradition made a cave the birthplace of Jesus, is of interest chiefly because it enables us to trace a possible origin for the story.

When we examine the myths connected with the births of the gods most commonly worshipped at the time when Christianity arose, we are struck by the fact that most of them were said to have been born in a cave.

Dionysos, the child of Zeus and Semele, was said to have been reared by Io (represented in art as a cow) in a cave.

Hermes was born in a cave of Cyllene.

Zeus himself, the offspring of Kronos and Rhea, was also brought up in a cave[2]—in this case to save him from his own father, who would have eaten him if he had found him. He survives to overthrow the father, who had attempted, like Herod and Astyages and others, to slay the being who was foretold as coming to dethrone or reign after him.

Mithra was said to have been born in a cave on the 25th of December. The rites connected with his worship were always carried on in caves or in buildings made to represent caves.

Even the philosopher Confucius—the founder of one of the greatest religions of the world—was said to have been

[1] Many other places near Jerusalem have been considered holy by the adherents of totally different religions, and have had various different myths attached to them as they passed from the possession of the adherents of one cult into the possession of adherents of another.

[2] On Mount Ida, it was generally believed; but some said at Dicte, in Crete. The philosophers regarded Kronos as the personification of Chronos (Time).

born in a cave, a voice from heaven proclaiming at the time, "This is a heaven-born, Divine child," and many other wonderful portents attending the event.

But, in addition to the cave, the mythological origin of Luke's story is apparent in the small detail of the manger in which, he says, the infant was laid. The manger, as well as the cave or stable, was a common detail in stories about the births of gods.

The Egyptians, according to an early Christian Chronicle,[1] worshipped "a child Saviour," born of a virgin and laid in a manger. This may have been Horus. It was anyhow, from the remarks made in the Chronicle, not Jesus, and the cult was evidently a very old one.

The manger theme is probably connected with the very ancient Indian and Egyptian sanctification of cows, dating from the earliest pastoral age. Hermes was represented as cradled in a basket, such as was and still is used as a manger in many parts of the East,[2] and surrounded by oxen, one of which is sniffing at the cradle.

An effigy of Dionysos used to be carried in a manger

[1] "Chronicon Paschale."

[2] In Greece at the present day, it is said, poor persons use the same or a similar basket as a manger for holding small quantities of corn, and as a crèche for cradling their children. (See Robertson's "Christianity and Mythology," second edition, pp. 191–92. Robertson also gives other examples of these myth-motives.)

Sir James Frazer, in his translation of Apollodorus, translates the Greek word for this kind of basket—liknos—"winnowing-fan." In a note to Apollodorus' account of the birth of Hermes, Sir James, quoting a large number of authorities, tells how both Hermes and Dionysos were, immediately after their birth, placed in "winnowing-fans," how Dionysos was called "He of the winnowing-fan," and how this ancient Greek custom was supposed to bring good fortune to the infants who were laid in the baskets. In Baluchistan infants are still laid for the first six days of their lives in "a chaj, or winnowing-basket," in the hope that "God will vouchsafe to them full as many children as the basket can hold grain." (Denys Bray's "The Life History of a Brahui," quoted by Frazer, op. cit., vol. ii, note on pp. 5–6.) A corn-sieve is often substituted for the winnowing-basket. Perhaps the custom no longer survives among Western races, because we are not apt to regard as many children as the grains of corn a basket can hold as an unmitigated blessing!

Liknites, the title of Dionysos, might be translated "He of the manger-basket," as it was an article of this kind, though doubtless used in winnowing, which was employed in the processions in honour of the god.

basket on the eve of the winter solstice; the 25th of December—the day when the old Sun dies and the new Sun is born again—having generally been regarded as the birthday of Gods.[1]

In the representations of Krishna's birth, already referred to, the babe is placed in a basket of this kind.

Botticelli's picture of the Nativity shows this kind of basket as the manger, as well as the other details to which we have already referred.

We find, therefore, when we study the ancient religions, that it was not only said of most gods that they were born of a virgin, but also, of many of them, that they were born in a cave and laid in a manger. Of the origin of these ideas students have many different theories. That the origins are lost in the mists of antiquity all are agreed.

As regards the cave theme, some have attributed its origin to various solar and astronomical observations allegorized. The sun rising daily out of his cave beneath the earth, or the sun entering some particular sign of the Zodiac on the Solar birthday, have been thought to have possibly given rise to such a story.

Some have attributed its earliest origin to the vegetation springing up out of the earth in which its seeds have been hidden, and growing up after being preserved from imminent dangers.

A myth might evolve out of poetical descriptions, or even out of prose records of this process.

Others have thought that such stories originate in a desire to emphasize the self-humiliation of the divine being, the hardships besetting the hero, and the miraculous preservation of a person, really so great, whose infancy was surrounded by so many dangers.

But, whatever the primary origin of all such myths

[1] This will be discussed later. See Appendix I. (It was not until comparatively late days, however, that that date was assigned as the birthday of Jesus also.)

may have been, the fact is undeniable that all these details of the story we are considering were commonplaces in the mythologies of the time in which it arose. They had been fictitiously related of many mythical beings who were worshipped as gods. Were they on this occasion, and on this occasion only—when they were already old—truthfully related of Jesus? And if any of these details were true, which were they? Those related by Matthew or those related by Luke? Or the ones related in "Apocryphal" Gospels of Jesus being born in a cave and afterwards transferred to a manger elsewhere, or the ones related in other "Apocryphal" Gospels of his being born in a stable and afterwards taken away to a cave?

There are yet other details in these two virgin-birth stories which remind every one who has studied other religions besides his own of the curious myths with which they abound. They are, however, of less importance than those we have already noticed, and so they will be referred to but briefly.

Matthew relates that three wise men came from the East, guided by a star which "stood over where the young child was."[1]

That a star should "stand over" any particular house is of course an impossibility. Some supposed miracles are, as we have mentioned, not absolute physical impossibilities, but merely contrary to experience. This one is more than that: it is a physical impossibility. Even if the forces which govern the movements of the earth and of all the celestial bodies ceased to act, the position of one of the stars could not be such as to designate one particular house. The great astronomer Kepler, the discoverer of some of those laws by which we can calculate the motions of the celestial bodies, hazarded the conjecture that the event recorded by Matthew was really a conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn.[2] Such an explana-

[1] ii, 9.

[2] See footnote to p. iii, vol. i, of Milman's "History of Christianity."

tion is typical of an age when no man ventured to suggest even that the evangelists could have made any mistakes, but a few were ready to suggest that when they said one thing they really meant something totally different; and this regardless of the context, which makes the explanation incompatible with the story and very little more rational.[1]

But signs and portents, astronomical and of other kinds, are said to have signalized the birth of many of the man-gods believed in by ancient races, and of many human heroes.[2] Ancient histories and pagan scriptures are full of such events. A "Star in the East" is not an uncommon sign to read of. In one continually recurring case—the re-incarnation of Thibetan Grand Lamas—a rainbow often guides, so it is said, the late Grand Lama's disciples to the spot where his successor has been born. Thither they repair to worship their new master.[3]

This is perhaps the most peculiar of all these stories, as it shows that some one has discovered "where the rainbow ends," and that even in the nineteenth century the Himalayas formed a barrier to the advance of the science of optics.

Luke, differing as usual from Matthew, tells of other portents. An angel and "a multitude of the heavenly host" appeared to some shepherds as they watched their flocks by night, and sang praises to God, the very words of their song being quoted.[4] Luke himself, even if he was

[1] The conjunction referred to by Kepler took place in 7 B.C., a date impossible to reconcile, as the date of the birth of Jesus, with any other parts of the Gospel stories. Moreover, this particular conjunction was not a close one, so the two planets could never have appeared as one star. A much closer conjunction took place in 65 B.C.; but neither that conjunction nor any of the other numerous periodical conjunctions of those and of other planets appear to have caused Magi, or any other astronomical observers, to travel in search of a newly-born infant. Magi, too, would hardly be so ignorant as to take a conjunction of planets for a new star; they would be unlikely to travel west because they saw a "star in the east"; and a planetary conjunction could certainly not direct them to an inn.

[2] E.g., of Cæsar.

[3] See Frazer's "Golden Bough," first edition, chapter i, p. 43.

[4] ii, 13-14.

the companion of Paul, did not hear these words sung. Whence came this tradition written down first, so far as we know, long after the event is supposed to have taken place?

According to a degenerate Neo-Buddhist legend, when Sumedha became a Buddha the rivers stood still, flowers rained from heaven, and even the fires of hell died down.

It is not suggested that the author of Luke must necessarily have borrowed from this much older and more florid story, but it should be noted that the idea is the same. The birth must be noted in heaven, and marked by something unusual on earth.[1]

Luke then tells us that the shepherds visited "the babe lying in a manger."

The "adoration of the shepherds" which has formed the subject of so many sacred Christian pictures, and which has occupied so prominent a place in our hymnals, might have been directly borrowed from Mithraism. In some of the sculptures portraying the miraculous birth of Mithra from a rock, shepherds are seen standing by.

So we find that none of the details of these two stories —whether one of them be true or not—were new. All of them are to be found in the current mythologies of the period, and many of them are common to every known mythology of the period.

If we eliminate from our Bibles these two stories, found in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke respectively, those Bibles are left without any history of, or even any reference to, the birth and childhood of Jesus; and we are free to regard the Virgin Birth story as on a par with all the other stories of virgin births with which the students of mythology have made us familiar.

[1] According to some of the "Apocryphal" Gospels, still greater wonders than those recorded in the Canonical Gospels took place. For example, even the birds in the air stopped in the midst of their flight (The Protevangelion, xiii, 2), and the cave in which the birth took place was brilliantly illuminated (ibid, xiv, 11, and the First Gospel of the Infancy, i, 10).

Chapter VII

THE CATHOLIC DOCTRINE—MODERN SCEPTICISM

Enough examples, of the many that could be quoted, have now been given to show that the story of a Virgin Birth was not a new one, but was a not unusual account of the birth of gods who had come down to earth as men, and that the details given in Matthew and Luke do not differ from those given in the stories of older cults in any greater degree than the details in one work of fiction differ from those in another which treats of the same theme.

Later on in early Christian history we find that the Virgin Mary inherits the festival of Cybele, mother of the pagan gods;[1] and that day—the 25th of March—was observed as "Lady Day" by the early Christian Churches in the same way as the Hilaria, the festival of the goddess, had been held by pagans at Rome before Christianity had been heard of. The Pantheon at Rome, which had been dedicated by Agrippa to Cybele, was, when Christianity became the State religion, re-dedicated as a Christian edifice to the Virgin Mary. The ancient ceremonies connected with the worship of Cybele were performed until quite recent years in honour of Mary. In Rome an image, said to be of the Virgin Mary, was carried down to the Tiber every year, in the same way as it had been carried, with another name attached to it, long before the Christian era.

In Asia Minor the Ephesians worshipped the Virgin Mary with the very same ceremonies as they had previously performed in honour of the goddess Diana.

[1] Cybele was known in Lydia under the name of Ma.

The festival of the "Assumption of the Virgin" is still celebrated in Christian churches at the same time of year as that in which the festival of Diana previously took place.

Wherever Christianity spread the same thing happened if a goddess had previously been worshipped.[1] The rites continued, but the name of the goddess changed to Mary. The Virgin Birth doctrine offered no hindrance, as all the goddesses of ancient mythology were regarded as capable of giving birth to children without prior male congress, and most of them as having actually done so.

So the doctrine was easy to believe. But in addition to this it was, in that age, a welcome doctrine.

In religious and philosophical circles there was going on a violent reaction against the Eastern contempt for unmarried and intact females—a contempt which, in a very modified form, is still shown everywhere towards "old maids"—and still more against the religious prostitution on a large scale as it was known in very many places, notably Alexandria, Corinth, and the Hindu temples, stories of which had probably reached the near East. The licentiousness of the age was bewailed by many pagan philosophers, and chastity and virginity were glorified by every moralist.[2]

This reaction, as such reactions always do, went beyond any rational limit. The relation of the sexes was spoken of as if it were at all times and in all circumstances evil.

"Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my

[1] And even, in at least one case, when a female divinity was subsequently worshipped. The Coptic Christian Scriptures represent Mary as claiming identity with the Manichæan "Mother of Life," a post-Christian divinity with many of the attributes of the pagan goddesses. (See note on pp. 300–2, chap. xiii, of "Manes and the Manichæans," in vol. ii of Legge's "Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity.")

[2] For examples of the high esteem in which chastity was held by the pre-Christian pagan philosophers and others see Lecky's "History of European Morals," chap. i, pp. 44–5 (Watts and Co.'s edition). The idea that Christianity introduced new ideals in this respect is entirely erroneous.

mother conceive me," was the kind of sentiment expressed by the extremists, who taught that the spiritual life was all that men should think of, and that all carnal things were essentially wicked.

Some theosophists taught that Matter was something apart from or in opposition to the Absolute; and they might possibly—if their premises were accepted—justify so sweeping a doctrine.

But to all others it must appear that this implication, that human generation by natural processes is in itself always sinful, merely casts a slur upon the supreme wisdom which, *ex hypothesi*, ordains that all species must thus be propagated.

It is an implication which has worked untold harm in the past, leading in many cases to those very excesses against which it had been intended as a protest, and, as every student of mediæval history knows, to the peculiar moral aberrations which disgraced monasticism and asceticism.

Meanwhile it led, coupled with the Jewish-Christian doctrine of original sin, to a curious further development of the Virgin Birth doctrine.

According to that doctrine, Jesus had not, like other men, been conceived in iniquity. He was therefore, unlike others, free from that taint of sin; but still theologians found it difficult to maintain the theory that he was altogether free from the taint of original sin inherited from Adam. Through his mother, even if he had no human father, he inherited that taint.

And so in the twelfth century the doctrine that the Virgin Mary's own birth had been immaculate and supernatural began to be accepted by many sects of the Catholic Church, and led to heated controversies between various bodies of Christians, more especially between the Dominicans and Franciscans. The great order of Dominicans always—or, at any rate, until quite recent years—denied the doctrine of Mary's immaculate concep-

tion, while their rivals, the Franciscans, strenuously upheld it.

It does not seem to have been recognized that logically, to get over the doctrine of original sin, every ancestress right back to Eve must be regarded as immaculately conceived. The Church found sufficient difficulty in gaining support for the doctrine of this one further miracle without inventing a hundred others, and it was not until quite recently—in 1854—that the Catholic Church officially accepted it, though it is a doctrine which has been widely held throughout the history of Christianity, and which narrowly escaped becoming, seven hundred years earlier, a fundamental dogma of the Christian faith, as so many other doctrines no less miraculous and no better founded upon historical evidence have become during the centuries which have elapsed since the original Christianity was evolved.

The mother of the Virgin Mary was named St. Anna,[1]

[1] Her name and that of Mary's father, Joachim, are mentioned in some of the "Apocryphal" Gospels. See "Gospel of the Birth of Mary" and "The Protevangelion," in Hone's "Apocryphal New Testament."

In the Middle Ages a host of further legends arose round the Gospel accounts of the Virgin Birth, and these legends received equal credence with those written in the second century. During the last two centuries these stories have gradually been dropped out of the religious instruction given to the young, and therefore out of the minds of the old; and only the canonical stories, difficult to be dropped by those who have accepted them as the basis of their creeds, have been retained. But these additions to the ancient stories are of interest, because they show how readily men accepted as facts inventions devoid of the slightest evidence.

The "wise men from the East" (Matt. ii, 1), unnumbered and unnamed by Matthew or by any ancient author, were confidently said to be three magi, and later on to be three kings named Gaspar, Balthazar, and Melchior. The first was said to have been, at the time they arrived at Bethlehem, sixty years old and King of Tarsus, the second to have been forty years old and King of Nubia, and the third twenty years old and King of Sheba. Thus they represented all the races of the world—Shem, Ham, and Japhet. In art they were pictured as brown, black, and white.

The names of the shepherds who watched their flocks by night also came to be known by the ecclesiastics of a few hundred years later. They were only four in number, and their names were Misael, Achael, Cyriac, and Stephen.

The name of every character in the Gospels was thus in time discovered by ingenious priests, and in many cases minute details about their lives were invented and believed by generations of men who lived some centuries later than the evangelists who only casually referred to them. Dismas

and many Christian churches were dedicated to her long before the dogma of Mary's immaculate conception was fixed in the Roman Catholic Church.

Yet another doctrine sprang from this same sanctification of virginity. This, the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, was mooted by some of the early Fathers of the Church, who quoted in support of their theory the words of Ezekiel (xliv, 2): "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut." That words plainly referring to a gate of the Temple should be taken as prophesying about the womb of a future mother of God is typical of the exegetical methods practised by early theologians and accepted by later ones.

Moreover, in view of the fact that Jesus is said in the Gospels to have had brethren, and that James is several times referred to as "the brother of Jesus," the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity and the motive for attempting to teach this doctrine are at first not easy to recognize.

But the idea, we find on studying comparative religion, is an old one. The mothers of each successive Buddha are said to have died shortly after giving birth to their divine children. Their wombs had become holy, and no other child might occupy them. Thence came the idea of perpetual virginity. The motive was, too, bound up with the doctrine of original sin—a doctrine which was inconsistent with human-born divinity, unless the mother was herself without original sin, in which case doctrinal difficulties arose about the birth and nature of any further children.

So the brothers of Jesus, of whom the Gospels speak,

was the name of the repentant thief, and he was the one who was crucified on the right hand of Jesus. Geshus was the name of the other thief. The repentance of Dismas was owing to a prayer of the Virgin Mary, who recognized him as a bandit into whose hands the Holy Family had fallen while in Egypt. (Luke alone records that one thief rebuked the other for reviling Jesus. Matthew and Mark state that both thieves reviled Him.)

though at first considered as his full brothers, were next —to preserve the virginity of Mary throughout her life— described by the Fathers of the Church as the children of Joseph by another wife; and lastly, when the Church, in her desire to glorify chastity, taught that Joseph had lived as a perpetual celibate, they were described as being really the first cousins of Jesus. Thus do myths grow among a priesthood.

In the middle of the fourth century Jovinian, an Italian monk, had the temerity to assert that Mary ceased to be a virgin when Jesus was born, and for this offence he was flogged and banished to a desolate island.[1] Thus do priesthoods ensure the survival of their myths.

The doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity, though it never became a fundamental dogma of Christianity, has been widely held, and is even found to be taught in many early Protestant theological works.

It is of interest to note that during the first four centuries of the Christian era nothing was known as to the death or burial of Mary, that then Ephesus—at the Synod held with reference to the "Mother of God" controversy[2]—claimed the honour of containing her burial place, that this was affirmed by the Synod to be a fact, and that much later Jerusalem claimed the same honour, which was eventually conferred on her by the Christian Churches.

At Jerusalem, in proof of their claim, the clergy used to show an empty sepulchre and explain that the Virgin had also been raised from the dead and had bodily ascended into heaven!

But these attempts to enlarge the original doctrine,

[1] J. M. Robertson's "Short History of Christianity," second ed., p. 146.

[2] It was at this Synod, held in 431, that Nestorius, then the orthodox patriarch of Constantinople, was declared a heretic and banished. Himself at one time a fanatical persecutor of heretics, he is now known as the founder of the Nestorian "heresy," which still flourishes in the East. The "Mother of God" controversy is described by Gibbon (chap. xlvii of the "Decline and Fall"), and throws much light on the process by which orthodox doctrine was settled.

and to get over difficulties by postulating still further miracles, were not the only questions about the Virgin Birth theory with which the Christian Churches had to deal. When we study the disputes which arose in the fourth century, at the time when the Trinity doctrine was first formulated, we find that many quarrels and much bloodshed ensued over the thorny questions connected with the "nature" of Christ. How far was he divine, and how far human? A host of difficulties attended every attempted solution. And again, if we study the beliefs held by various sects of Christians who were suppressed as heretics by the Catholic sect when it became allied with the Roman emperors and attained to power, we find that a large number of conflicting beliefs divided Christianity over this very question of the birth of Jesus.

The story of these disputes and heresies is too long to tell here, and can be studied in the pages of Gibbon. We note them now only because surprise is sometimes expressed, by those who have not studied the doctrinal controversies of the Christian Churches, that this doctrine, if it is not well founded, should have been accepted without demur by so many and for so long. This surprise is based upon a misapprehension or ignorance of two facts. First, the fact that the doctrine has been repeatedly questioned; and, secondly, the fact that from the fourth century, when the Catholic Church became all-powerful, until the nineteenth century, when the State Churches began to lose their power, those who questioned it were effectually silenced by the irresistible power of orthodoxy.

From the writings of the very earliest "Fathers of the Church" we learn that not only Jews and pagans, but many Christians, rejected the Virgin Birth story.

Celsus, the principal refuter in the second century of Christian doctrines, asserted that the Virgin Birth story had never been heard of until a few years before he himself wrote; and, as he probably wrote between 177

and 180 A.D., this statement agrees very well with the dates given elsewhere to the first appearance of Matthew's and Luke's stories. According to Celsus, the Gospel story was continually being altered and added to, with a view to meeting criticisms upon and objections to it. This may or may not be true, but it is at any rate an accusation which was made, and which the Church Fathers tried to answer—in their manner, not by bringing evidence to show that it was untrue, but by declaring that it was the "heretics" who were attempting to falsify the books.

Celsus, before his own attack on Christianity by philosophical arguments, brings in an imaginary Jew, who alleges that Jesus was the bastard son of a soldier in the Roman Army, named Panthera or Pandira, and that Mary was divorced by Joseph because of this intrigue; but the story is not very convincing as it appears for the first time in the second century, and is supported by no evidence. This story was often resuscitated by uncritical opponents of Christianity, especially by the Jews, and has even been accepted by critical historians of Christianity. These latter identify the Jesus of Christianity with a Joshua or Jesus ben Pandira, who is alleged to have lived about 100 B.C., and of whom the Jews relate many stories similar, in certain respects, to those of the Gospels. Some critics believe that it was round the name of this teacher that the Gospel legends afterwards gathered; but to the present writer it seems more likely that the whole story was invented as a satire on, and refutation of, the Christian story.

However that may be, we know from Origen, who wrote in the first half of the third century "Against Celsus," that these accusations were made; and we know from the writings not only of Origen, but of all the early Church Fathers, that the Virgin Birth doctrine was constantly disputed, and was not believed in even by some of those who held the highest positions in the "orthodox" Christian Church.

Paul of Samosata, for example, taught that Christ was a man and not divinely born, but that, being anointed by the Holy Ghost at his baptism, and keeping himself free from sin, he eventually became united to God. This, as we have already seen, was the doctrine of the "Adoptionist" sect of Christians.[1]

For holding and for teaching such a doctrine Paul does not seem to have been blamed; but he also taught a doctrine which appears to be diametrically opposed to the above—viz., that God the Son was consubstantial with God the Father; and this latter doctrine, which very soon afterwards became the very nucleus of the Athanasian Creed, was condemned in the year 269 by a large council of the Church, at Antioch. By this council Paul, who was then patriarch of Antioch, was sentenced to be deposed. He did not, however, surrender his position until the Roman emperor Aurelian confirmed the sentence in 272. Thus did a pagan emperor aid in settling what was to be the orthodox faith for the time being.

But the Virgin Birth doctrine seems still to have been regarded as an open question. A belief in it became obligatory among Christians only when the "Catholic" sect of Christians allied itself with the Emperor Constantine, assumed the name of orthodox, and, aided by the secular arms of the State, enforced, at the point of the sword, its doctrines upon all men. All doctrines other than its own were then suppressed as heresies. Fertile countries were turned into deserts, and hundreds of thousands of men perished in the wars by which this policy was carried out.

When the Catholic Church eventually triumphed, any expression of doubt was prohibited, and any criticism of the Virgin Birth doctrine was, for many centuries, answered by the imprisonment or the death of the offender. But, in spite of all this, some sects of Christians,

[1] See p. 32.

besides those primitive sects to which we have already referred, have disbelieved in the doctrine, and a few, in spite of the cruellest persecution, managed to escape total suppression. Of these we will now refer only to the most important survivor—the Unitarians. In England at the present day there are some hundreds of Unitarian churches; in America some thousands. They worship as God only the First Person of the orthodox Christian Trinity, and they regard Jesus as a man and a prophet. They number among their precursors Servetus, a most learned man, who, in addition to other distinctions, is famous for anticipating part of Harvey's doctrine of the circulation of the blood.

Servetus was burnt to death in 1553 at Geneva, at the instigation of the Protestant reformer Calvin, for printing a tract denying the miraculous birth of Christ. In England the first Unitarian to be burnt to death suffered at Norwich in 1579, and a spasmodic persecution of the sect, between that date and the beginning of the nineteenth century, when they obtained the protection of the Act of Toleration, ensured that their views and arguments should not become widely known. Very few persons ever heard the Virgin Birth doctrine questioned, and fewer still heard or could understand the arguments against its acceptance. Whenever and wherever the ecclesiastical authorities were sufficiently powerful, the prospect of being burnt at the stake, together with the books in which their arguments were published, deterred even the boldest sceptics from attempting a task which seemed useless; so men who themselves doubted refrained from imparting their doubts to others. Even when the Church became less powerful and the State more humane, contumely, disgrace, and secular disabilities awaited those who expressed any doubts; while honours, position, and wealth might be attained by those who professed orthodox opinions. Until the numbers of nonconformists, dissenters, and sceptics

became large enough to enforce toleration, and some small measure of freedom of speech for all men, unorthodox doctrines were heard by only a very small number of men, and those men were generally classical scholars with ecclesiastical or educational positions to lose if, like the eccentric but honest Whiston, the translator of Josephus, they were too conscientious for the "protective mimicry" of discreet ambiguities.

Even learned theologians, classical scholars themselves, lived in an atmosphere in which "faith" was so firmly established by centuries of unquestioned, or rather of not openly questioned, tradition that they mostly ignored altogether those very difficulties which nowadays loom so large before the defenders of the faith.

If we read Milman's celebrated "History of Christianity," published in 1840, and turn to what he has to say about the Virgin Birth, we find no attempt made to explain or to reconcile the different stories told by Matthew and Luke. We discover, indeed, no reference to the fact that there are any differences between the two evangelists, nor to the fact that nowhere else in the New Testament is the Virgin Birth referred to. We find no comment on the fact that many passages in these books are irreconcilable with the story of a virgin birth.

We do, it is true, find—mostly in brief footnotes—references to some of the exegetical difficulties which confront the orthodox commentator. The era of historical criticism had already dawned, and an ecclesiastical author could no longer, like his predecessors, entirely ignore those difficulties. So they are not entirely ignored, but are brushed aside as of no great importance.[1] For example, regarding the census, he remarks: "The chronological difficulties in this case do not appear to me of great importance."[2]

[1] Compare Dean Farrar's Preface to his "Life of Christ," pub. 1874.

[2] "History of Christianity," vol. i, p. 106, footnote. Compare Farrar, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

If, he says further on,[1] the author of Luke's Gospel made a mistake as to the name of Cyrenius, even then "his general truth would remain unshaken" by "so trivial and natural an inaccuracy." Milman did not, it seems, realize that if, in the few instances in which we possess the data for checking the evangelists' statements, we invariably find them to be undoubtedly erroneous, we have no reason for believing that all their other statements, which we have no means of definitely checking, must undoubtedly be true. The story as a whole is a remarkably strange one. It is, as we have before stated, told by two writers only, so as a whole we can check it only by comparing the versions of these two authors one with the other. But in the details of the story we find references made to historical persons, Herod and Cyrenius, of whom many other authors have written. Here and here alone we can check the statements made by the tellers of the story, and here we discover that those statements cannot be accurate. Would Dean Milman have thought it a trivial matter if some secular historian were to be proved wrong in every statement he made which could be checked? Would he say that "his general truth would remain unshaken" if this were done? "Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus" may not always be a legitimate presumption, but the burden of proof lies heavily on the shoulders of those detected in error.

In the same way with the incident related of the "Massacre of the Innocents," the only comment—in a footnote—points out the absurdity of the tradition held almost universally by Christians up to Milman's own times, that 14,000 or 144,000 children were actually massacred. He makes short work of his orthodox predecessors, who had given support to this story, and passes on without noticing the fact that no such massacre of children is reported by any history of the times.

[1] Milman, op. cit., pp. 128-29.

He does not ignore secular history, as he tells us of the political disputes, and indeed puts them forward as a reason why, in spite of all the wonderful events said to have attended the birth of Jesus—the arrival of the Magi, the striking dumb of Zachariah, and so on—the Jews appear to have forgotten that a Messiah had been born to them.

No man but one blinded by intolerance—and a sceptic has for intolerance not even the excuse of the faithful, who believe that those who disagree with them are guilty of mortal sin—would accuse Milman of deliberately concealing or distorting the truth. That is not our suggestion. We, in fact, make no accusation against our learned and interesting author. We only draw attention to the fact that he, in common with the majority of men of his day, was so accustomed to regard the faith in which he had been brought up as somehow in all essentials true, that he never with unbiased mind considered the difficulties which to unprejudiced observers seem so obvious. They judged their own doctrines by a standard entirely different from that which they applied to other religions.

They did not, for example, attempt to find any reasons which could justify a belief in their own Virgin Birth story, and yet not at the same time justify a belief in the numerous other Virgin Birth stories of antiquity; but they just took for granted that their story was true, and the others utter absurdities. So difficulties were not faced or explained, but either unnoticed or swept aside as unimportant. The thing was true; the evidence for or against it was of no importance whatever!

We know that Milman, in his Preface, announces that his "notion of history is, that it should give the results, not the process of inquiry," and that he assures us—as we have certainly no reason for doubting—that "he has with his utmost diligence investigated, and with scrupulous fidelity repeated, what appeared to him to be the truth"; yet it is apparent, from the few notes which

he does give us about the episodes most open to criticism as unhistorical, that his inquiries were regarded by himself as merely of pedantic interest, and were not at any time directed to the question of whether the stories under consideration were in their main features true.

Strauss's "Life of Jesus,"[1] which appeared shortly before Milman's work was finished, is referred to in an Appendix; and here again our author reiterates that his plan does not "require or admit" of minute investigations into the origin or truth of Christian opinions. In short, the learned future Dean did not attempt to elucidate anything. He either himself did not fully appreciate the weakness of the evidence he used, or, writing for the devout, was careful to say nothing that might arouse serious doubts in their minds.

On the fundamental point of Virgin Birth stories being common in the East, he again makes only one brief remark, in a footnote.[2] In this note he expresses surprise that a similar story is told of "Budh," and also of "the Fohi[3] of China and the Schaka of Thibet"—persons whom he, therefore, identifies with the Buddha himself, though we are further informed that the virgin mother of the latter was Maia, and that the virgin mother of Schaka was named Lamoghinpral. We are also told in the same footnote that "certain incidents, for example, in the history of the Indian Chrishna are so similar to those of the life of Christ that Dr. Goignaut is almost inclined to believe that they are derived from some very early

[1] Strauss, after a minute and careful investigation of the Gospels, came to the conclusion that the story related in them was not historical. But, he said, though not true as historical facts, they are, of course, true as religious facts. Since Tertullian stated that he believed because it was impossible, no such astounding profession of faith had been made. What Strauss really meant his readers to believe—unless it was that he still remained a supporter of the Church, though he did not believe in the facts which it taught—it is impossible to say. Perhaps he meant that the Gospel story was to be taken as symbolic, and that it was true in the sense that the ideals which it inculcated were good and true as ideals. Later in life Strauss became a far more outspoken critic of Christianity.

[2] Op. cit., p. 99.

[3] Milman apparently refers to Fuh-ke (see ante, p. 146, note 2).

Christian tradition. In the present instance, however, the peculiar sanctity attributed to virginity in all countries, where the ascetic principle is held in high honour as approximating the pure and passionless human being to the divinity, might suggest such an origin for a deity in human form."

This is a typical example of the careless confidence with which learned theologians of the middle of last century applied to religions and creeds other than their own the very arguments which were really as destructive of it as of them. The bold Dr. Goignaut, instead of feeling "almost inclined to believe" that the early Krishna stories were derived from the far later Christianity, might—bolder still—have reversed his theory, had he for a moment considered the bare possibility of anything in his own religion not being absolutely true, and exactly as stated in the doctrines of his Church.[1]

And Milman's own theory of a Virgin Birth story being suggested by the sanctity connected with virginity might with equal justice and force be applied to the Christian doctrine as well as to the story of "Budh."[2]

Milman's "History of Christianity" has been dealt with at, perhaps, undue length, not for the sake of carping at the Dean or at other theologians who pursued the same path, but to explain how it was that even in the nineteenth century the difficulties in the way of believing this Virgin Birth story were not known to most Englishmen, though in France they were already both recognized and acknowledged.

In the fear that the excesses of the French Revolution would be the inevitable concomitant of doubt, free speech and open discussion of these difficulties were still debarred. These fears were, as events have proved, ill founded; but

[1] The Krishna cult is two or three hundred years older than Christianity, to which it has many very striking resemblances.

[2] See Appendix III for comparison between Dean Milman's and Dr. Gore's (formerly Bishop of Oxford) treatment of the Virgin Birth story.

that the fear was felt is indisputable.[1] That the orthodox writers of this period did not attempt to defend their doctrines against attack is evidence not that they considered the position of these doctrines impregnable, but that there were no attacks of importance as yet being made upon them in England.

The State and the ecclesiastical authorities were as orthodox in their strategy as in their theology. They did not stand upon the defensive, but defended themselves by attacking their opponents. Even when some measure of freedom of speech had been gained, even when men had at last forced the allied powers of State and Church to grant them liberty to worship in any way they chose, authors and speakers who openly attacked the orthodox doctrines were still liable to be prosecuted for blasphemy and to be imprisoned for long periods of time. To impugn, even in the most temperate words, any fundamental doctrine of Christianity was, until quite recently, a criminal offence. Unless offensive words are used, prosecutions for this offence are now never set on foot; but until towards the end of last century convictions could be obtained in cases in which the language of doubt was quite free from the reproach of offensiveness.

Many men, apart from those belonging to "heretical" sects and to "infidel" religions, doubted, but few dared to attack the defences behind which orthodoxy was firmly entrenched. Public opinion, however, gradually changed.[2]

[1] In politics, for example, note the difference between the democratic pre-revolution Burke and the post-revolution reactionary Burke. The suppression by Governments of free speech upon any subject on which controversy was considered by them undesirable is discussed by Buckle in his "History of Civilization in England." For example of such suppression in England see especially chapter vii, vol. i, of that very interesting and learned work.

[2] This change may be said to have been chiefly brought about by the advance in geological, biological, and other scientific knowledge, which, by causing men first to doubt the truth of the Creation story in Genesis, led them to inquire into the foundations of their other beliefs, and to become more tolerant of attacks which they found had been, in some cases at any rate, justified.

Judges became averse to applying antiquated laws, and laws unwillingly administered are usually found to provide loopholes of escape. Archbishops and bishops began to dread the publicity which unorthodox views gained when prosecutions took place. At centres of learning, and in places more humble from an intellectual point of view, scepticism became more common than orthodox faith.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century there have been in Great Britain but few prosecutions under the Blasphemy Laws, and those few have been mostly directed against what has been regarded as scurrilous and vulgar abuse of views held sacred by many worthy, if ill-informed, persons.

The Blasphemy Laws no longer either terrorize men into silence or irritate them into verbal excesses. Orthodoxy's sole remaining weapons are social and professional ostracism, and these are losing their edge. It is, therefore, now possible to hear both sides of the question. The doctrines of the Established Church, like the theories of any other body, can be criticized in print as they never could until the end of last century.[1] Men can read the cons as well as the pros. We can all study the origin of our religion.

The result of such study is startling to those who, having been educated as orthodox Christians, first undertake it in later life, and to those who do not themselves undertake it, but hear the result.

Confining our attention once more to the Virgin Birth story, we find that very few laymen who have studied its origin still believe in it, and that even among the clergy most of the more thoughtful and better-educated men acknowledge that there is insufficient testimony for the doctrine, and that therefore it is open to doubt, or even that it is not credible.

"But," they say, "what can we do? Convocation

[1] Though such criticisms are still generally banned by the popular libraries and excluded from the bookstalls.

has repeatedly discussed this question of what it calls 'Modernism,' and has as often re-affirmed its determination not to tamper with any of the traditional doctrines of our Church. We entered the Church before we realized, or had even heard of, the arguments which now appear to us unanswerable; we believe that we are doing good work in our parishes; we believe very firmly in a Christianity which we do not think is dependent upon the miraculous and supernatural elements introduced long after its founder's death into the story of his life. Are we to give up our work because it involves the nominal acceptance of a doctrine which we consider to be of no great importance? Several generations must always pass away before any new idea permeates the mind of the general public, and so we are unable to obtain immediate acceptance of our views. Are we not justified in remaining at our posts, and in using the words of our creeds in a symbolic sense or with some private reservation? The public is not yet ripe to be told the truth."

This is not an altogether fanciful speech put into the mouth of an imaginary sceptical parson. Every man who has been on sufficiently intimate terms with clergymen, and has sufficient acquaintance with modern criticism of the doctrines of the Church to discuss theology with them, will know that it is but a paraphrase of what he has often heard said. In country parishes, here and there, parsons may yet be found who have never studied any criticism of their own doctrines; but, with these exceptions, the above speech closely indicates the attitude taken up by both the higher and the lower ranks of the clergy of to-day. And it is difficult not in some measure to sympathize with such an attitude, dishonest though it really is. We cannot demand that all men should be heroes unless, in our conceit, we believe that we ourselves would always be heroic. It requires a great deal of courage for these men to proclaim openly and aloud that they have ceased to believe in a doctrine in whose truth they have, on every Sunday for

many years, officially affirmed their belief. It requires a great deal of courage to give up one's life's work, one's livelihood, and one's ambitions, and to confess a mistake which has been pointed out by those very same sceptics whose views, and whose objects even, one has hitherto regarded as altogether evil.

To few men does it fall to have to confess that an opinion they had hitherto always held, that something they had up till now always taught as irrefutable truth, that what will appear to others as the very cornerstone of their doctrines, is really false. To fewer still would such a confession mean loss of some, perhaps of all, income, deprivation of their social position, and possibly homelessness.

It is improbable that our leading clergy will ever candidly admit the validity of modern research and criticism so long as their careers in an Established Church depend upon the orthodoxy of their expressed opinions, and upon their adherence to the creeds which were taken over from the Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation.

It is, apparently, easy to deceive oneself by appeals to Faith (which is too often a synonym for wilful blindness) when any other course means the loss of all that one has been taught to hold dear, and also the loss of a hard-earned position in life.

Charitably we must give credit for self-deception to distinguished ecclesiastics and to other clergymen who evidently fully realize that such doctrines as that of the Virgin Birth are untenable, but who do not candidly admit their disbelief in them; who, on the contrary, elude the making of definite pronouncements on the question by discussing symbolical and allegorical and metaphorical interpretations, and thus attempt to connect some remote spiritual values with grossly material mythology. They deceive themselves, we must suppose, into thinking that some good cause is served by acquiescence in deceit, and into believing that an ethical superstructure need not

necessarily be founded upon the bed-rock of truth. Such self-deception is the only charitable explanation of essays which practically admit the invalidity of these doctrines being written by men who retain positions theoretically tenable only by those who accept, without any reservation, the creeds of our Anglican Prayer-book.

By any one who has followed the theological and ecclesiastical controversies of recent years, the gradual surrender of this Virgin Birth doctrine, veiled though that surrender still is, will have already been noticed, and the names of the principal ecclesiastical dignitaries who have tacitly admitted that surrender will be well known.

Having, however, no desire to indulge in personalities, nor to pick out by name from so many clerical sceptics those who have already aroused the indignation of the less well-informed members of the orthodox flock, the only names which will be here mentioned are those openly affixed to the title-pages of the books quoted.

The attention of those hitherto ignorant of the existence of clerical scepticism on this subject must now be drawn to the statements made by clergymen themselves during the past few years, and to do this without mentioning any names is impossible, since when quotations are made from published books it is only fair to mention their names, so that the reader may, if he desires, not only verify the words quoted, but also study their context. Where, however, the words quoted do not appear under their actual speaker's name in any generally accessible book, or are the words of accusers and not of the accused, names will be omitted.

In 1902 a learned bishop, in a lecture upon "The Historical Trustworthiness of the Gospels," stated that "the evidence of our Lord's birth of a virgin was not part of the original Apostolic teaching."

In 1917, when a well-known dean was created a bishop, a loud outcry arose among the more conservative of the orthodox to the effect that he was a heretic and did not

believe in "an Incarnation effected by miracles," and had stated that the nature of "Our Lord was a severely normal humanity," and that the story of the Virgin Birth was "generally assumed by the learned to belong less to history than to poetry."

Another very well-known and influential ecclesiastic, a dean of great learning and eloquence, has written a series of essays in which he practically admits the validity of modern criticism of this and other Christian doctrines. He occupies one of the most distinguished positions in the Church, and attracts crowded congregations to listen to his sermons. Yet he has apparently ceased to believe in the creeds which are repeated in his cathedral.

Referring to a certain bishop's refusal to ordain deacons who do not *ex animo* believe in the creeds, though the same bishop allowed some latitude of belief in the case of the Thirty-nine Articles to which the candidate had—at the same time—to make his formal assent, the Dean states that, though there are some men who abstain from entering the Church because they are required to give their assent to these creeds,

> there are many others who recognize that knowledge grows and opinions change, while formularies for the most part remain unaltered; and who consider that, so long as their general position is understood by those among whom they work, it would be over-scrupulous to refuse an inward call to the ministry because they know that they will be asked to give a formal assent to unsuitably worded tests drawn up three centuries ago.....No loyal Christian wishes to impugn a doctrine which touches so closely the life of the Redeemer as the account of his miraculous conception, which appears, in our texts, in two books of the New Testament. If the tradition is as old as the Church, which is very doubtful, it must, from the nature of the case, rest on the unsupported assertion of Mary, the mother of Jesus; for Joseph could only testify that the child was not his. It is therefore useless to reinforce the Gospel narrative by appealing to "Catholic tradition," as if it could add anything to the evidence. It is significant, however, of the Bishop's own feelings

> about tradition that he quietly sets aside the plain statement of the Synoptic Gospels that Joseph and Mary had a large family of four sons and more than one daughter by their marriage. This statement, which is doubtless historical, became intolerable to the conscience of the Church during the long frenzy of asceticism, when marital relations were regarded as impure and degrading; and in consequence the perpetual virginity of Mary, though contradicted in the New Testament, became as much an article of faith as her conception of Jesus by the Holy Ghost,.....it becomes a duty to point out that, on ordinary principles of evidence, the story must share the uncertainty which hangs over other strange and unsupported narratives.....We should have preferred to be silent on this delicate subject but for the fact that some men whom the Church can ill spare have been advised officially not to apply for ordination on account of their views about this miracle. Fortunately, the practice of demanding more specific declarations than the law requires has not been adopted in most dioceses.[1]

When some of our bishops and deans range themselves upon the side of all modern learning, disbelieve in the Virgin Birth, and treat the Resurrection story as an allegory, is it not time to alter the articles of faith, and to admit to the ministry those who are unable to subscribe to those ancient accretions to Christianity, the Creeds, but who would, if they were allowed to do so, take part in the work of social regeneration to which the Churches hold the keys? An honest and open repudiation, instead of a tacit acquiescence in other men's repudiations, would enable a large body of fervent workers to co-operate in whatever good work these ecclesiastics have at heart, and would alienate only those who are both ignorant and conservative.

These bishops, when an outcry arises among such folk, appear to lose courage. They recede from the critical standpoint which has alarmed their followers and endangered their positions, they recant the "heresies" of their

[1] "Bishop Gore and the Church of England" (1908), by W. R. Inge; republished in "Outspoken Essays." The Dean refers to the Bishop's "Dissertations."

more independent days, and they avoid as far as possible all further references to doctrines so difficult to believe and so dangerous to deny. When we turn from the "we would if we dared" attitude of these Churchmen in conspicuous places to the theologians who are more free to speak their own minds, we still find the same hesitation openly to avow the doubts by which even the most orthodox are assailed.

In modern orthodox apologetics the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is generally avoided. The word "Incarnation" is, it is true, often used, but only in such a way that it might mean anything. That the reader of these apologetics is unlikely to believe the Virgin Birth story seems taken for granted, but instead of a frank grappling with the doctrine we find such assertions as these:—

"Some doctrine of the divinity of Christ is necessary."

Though "we are not concerned with the exact meaning or formulation of the identity thus asserted" (in the orthodox creeds) "between Jesus and God," we must regard his death "as the act of God himself."

"If he were not God.....," his goodness would be of no importance; so we must think of him differently from the way we think of Socrates, for example. And so, for these reasons, we look upon his self-sacrificing death as "an essential part of the activity whereby God is God."

".....we need an assurance of the triumph of good in the world at large; and for such an assurance we need to believe that the life and character of Jesus were, in a pre-eminent sense, the life and character of God." By which we mean "at least that God was in Christ in such sense that the work of Christ was the work of God, and the character of Christ a clue to the character of God."

"And the practical meaning of the assertion of the divinity of Christ is that these qualities [inexhaustible love of men and readiness for self-sacrifice in their behalf] characterize God himself."

"This [change of character and abandonment of self

to the will power of another] is what the Greek Fathers were trying to express when they thought of Christ as uniting in himself the substance of Divinity with the substance of Humanity which is present in all individual men. The expression was imperfect, because too materialistic; but the idea which they were trying to express is vital to any theology of the Atonement."[1]

So these apparently are the best explanations orthodox scholars can give of the words: "Jesus Christ His only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." It is diluted Gnosticism, but apparently the best defence that can now be offered for the retention in our creeds of an "imperfect expression."

It purports to be a "re-statement" of Christian doctrine, but it is really a polite denial of that doctrine—a denial concealed as much as possible under a torrent of words.

We need a certain assurance because it is vital to some other theological doctrine; for that assurance we need a certain belief; therefore we accept that belief. That belief is not indeed the same as that expressed in the creeds; but that expressed in the creeds may, if watered down until it retains only a metaphorical meaning, have some sort of resemblance to it. As the doctrine, when expressed in crude terms, is incredible, we are to regard it as having a new and esoteric meaning.

Once more we refuse to face actual facts, and try, unsuccessfully, to devise imaginary facts to suit our theories.

If this new Gnosticism meant—as it logically should mean—the repudiation of all the metaphysical orthodox doctrines of the Incarnation, and a concurrent concentration upon the Spirit of Christianity, expressed not only in the lives led by the Neo-Gnostics, but also in the ideals

[1] Quotations all from "Foundations: A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought," by Seven Oxford Men. (Six of the seven are ordained clergymen; the seventh a lecturer in Philosophy.) Published in 1913.

which they preach, no sceptic could reasonably complain of the still remaining vestiges of mysticism which characterize it; but to the orthodox apologists it means nothing of the kind.

It only means, it appears, that the unavowed Gnostic retains the verbal doctrine and his own claim to orthodoxy, though he does not believe in those doctrines, or at any rate does not believe them in their ordinary literal sense, and though his only better claim to orthodoxy than other heretics is that he desires to remain in the State Church.

Rather than cut himself adrift from his Church, rather than desert those whom he regards as his fellow soldiers in battle, he stifles his thoughts, he tries to doubt his own doubts, and in torrents of rhetoric he attempts to conceal from others what he can no longer hide from himself. Like some financiers on the eve of bankruptcy, he postpones the evil moment by devising and issuing balance-sheets which do not disclose the real position of affairs.[1]

Again, we find in this same work, as a re-statement of the Virgin Birth doctrine, the assertion that "the real Incarnation consisted in the demonstration that God is Love....."[2] This gets over "the supernatural conception of [Jesus, which it is] difficult to accept on intellectual grounds,"[3] but leaves nothing at all of the orthodox doctrine.

Though we are at a loss to understand how a demonstration can be an Incarnation, we are not now quarrelling with the re-statement; we only point out that repudiation would be a better word than re-statement, and ask how we can honestly repeat the creeds if we accept this new definition of the word "Incarnation."

All the other theories by which theologians have endeavoured, while surrendering the fact of the Virgin

[1] This is not intended to apply to any authors of "Foundations" in particular, but to apologists of the rhetorical, metaphorical, and allegorical school in general.

[2] W. H. Moberley, on p. 229 of "Foundations," op. cit.

[3] Ibid.

Birth, to retain the doctrine of the Incarnation are equally open to the objection that they retain phrases from which all meaning has been abstracted.

Some of these are briefly mentioned by Lobstein in his essay on "The Virgin Birth of Christ," to which students can refer. Here we are not concerned with mystical theories of an incarnate "Word," or of the re-incarnation of a pre-existing Being, but with the doctrine that Jesus was "conceived" by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin; and that doctrine is not in any measure salved by postulating some totally different theory of Divine incarnation, even if any of these theories were comprehensible or supported by any evidence. This, as a matter of fact, none of them are. To say, as some of the apologists do, that, as Jesus was God, he must have been miraculously born, is to reverse the usual argument and substitute the question for its answer—to assume what is required to be proved, and make that assumption evidence of the proofs. It used to be argued that the fact of the Virgin Birth was evidence that Jesus was God; some of the new defenders of the faith say that the fact that Jesus is God is evidence that he was born of a virgin![1]

Again, to say that even if the Virgin Birth is not an historical fact it is "a religious truth," may be good theology, but is certainly bad logic. And that, apparently, is the best claim that many theologians can make for the retention of the doctrine.

This distinction between historic facts and religious facts[2] was originally made by Catholics, and is, it appears, supported by some such argument as this :—

[1] Dr. Gore, who, however, accepts the Virgin Birth doctrine on other grounds, writes: "Nevertheless I must confess that I cannot imagine how the birth of the really sinless man could have occurred without some physical miracle....." ("Belief in God," p. 281). This statement involves an assumption which we need not now consider, as the real point of interest is that the Bishop apparently believes that sinlessness is a greater miracle than parthenogenesis—a belief strangely pessimistic and derogatory to the Supreme worker of miracles.

[2] "Fact-like historical pictures" which need not be regarded as pictures of facts.

No event which happened at any particular moment of time and in any particular region of space is of any importance whatever. Historians may concern themselves with such matters, but philosophers are not interested in them. The only things which are real, the only things which are of importance, are men's conceptions. Even if Jesus never lived, Christ has for ages lived in men's minds. That imaginary Christ was born of a virgin and rose from the dead. That Christ is everlasting. That Christ is real.

This, unless we greatly misunderstand them, is their idea of a religious truth which is independent of historical truth.

So they repeat the creeds about an Ideal, and regard that Ideal as Reality! So, though the allegations upon which its original doctrines were founded may be exploded, the Church still stands secure upon a metaphysical basis!

The Church remains. Another shake to the kaleidoscope gives a new pattern to the old doctrines. The Church is all-important; the truth of doctrines is unimportant. The Church is everlasting; facts are but fleeting episodes. The Church has always been the idol of Catholic theologians, and those who foresee its old supports in ruins hasten to prop up the structure with anything that comes to hand, lest it fall with them. In the eternal flux of all things, its shape may dissolve into new forms, but so long as it preserves its entity its lovers will think that they can trace the lineaments of its romantic youth. The very perversity of their arguments is a measure of the feeling which these modernists have of the impossibility of defending the doctrines of their Church as facts.

"It does not follow that harmony of faith with the truths of reason and facts of experience is the best or essential condition of its credibility."

"It rests with each of us by an act of will to create

the sort of world to which we shall accommodate our thought and action."[1]

In other words, because our faculties are limited, because our senses are imperfect guides, we are to dethrone our intellects and substitute our untrammelled wills as dictators! Most of us, however discontented we may be with our present rulers, will hesitate before we depose them in favour of autocrats so irresponsible and contentious—rulers whose capacity for forming wise judgments seems even more limited and imperfect than that of our present ones.

Whatever may be the fate of this doctrine of the Virgin Birth, it will not be retained if its retention involves an avowed abrogation of reason and experience.

Some theologians are anxious to part with, if they cannot satisfactorily "re-state," the doctrine, and believe that Christianity would remain as strong or stronger without it. Whether that is so or not so time will certainly show, as, tacitly or openly, even the orthodox are gradually surrendering a position which they find is no longer tenable.

At every Church Conference and at most Convocations the subject crops up, and the lament is heard that "orthodoxy is in ruins."

At a Conference of the Churchmen's Union held last year at Cambridge, a learned doctor of divinity said that "our study of Christ's life showed us him with a fully human nature and consciousness of intimacy with God and dependence on him, never a consciousness of actually being himself other than human. The orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation could only be maintained to-day by help of the very doubtful hypothesis of a complete depotentiation of the divine son."[2]

Hundreds of similar statements could be quoted from speeches delivered at other congresses of professedly ortho-

[1] Tyrrell, "Lex Orandi."
[2] From account in the "Times" of August 21, 1921.

dox clergy and laymen. And not only Anglican but Roman Catholic priests also disbelieve this Virgin Birth doctrine and yet find it compatible with their disbelief to retain their positions in the Church and to repeat its creeds.

Some "devout Catholics.....believe Joseph to have been the real and natural father of Jesus," and some of these devout Catholics are priests.[1] These priests, it appears, defend their equivocal position by saying that they use the word "virgin" as meaning "young woman," thus reversing the process by which Isaiah's Hebrew word "almah" was erroneously translated "virgin." In their desire to retain their old creeds they are reduced to such quibbles.

We can perhaps sympathize with, though we cannot excuse, those who refuse to part openly with their former beliefs, even when they can no longer credit them. It is not ignoble to stick to old friends long after we have discovered them to be altogether untrustworthy; but it is reprehensible to insist that others should also trust them, and it is both reprehensible and ignoble to stick to them merely from fear of what others will say. It cannot be right for leaders of opinion to use their influence to make men place their trust in doctrines which they do not themselves trust.

At a Church Congress held in Birmingham during October, 1921, the Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking of the repudiation of the old "creedal verities," said:—

> Nor, I think, are there many thoughtful people among those who "profess and call themselves Christians" who can read without disquiet some of the phrases, negative or critical, taken from formal utterances which have recently been given to us by responsible theologians of the Church. They come to us in the garb, quite honestly worn, of an adventurous attempt to include within the ambit of a reasonable Christian faith what seems to most

[1] Dr. Mirval, "The Continuity of Catholicism" ("Nineteenth Century" of January, 1900). Dr. Mirval is an admirer of Catholic institutions, and on intimate terms with many priests; so he is not prejudiced.

> of us strangely like a repudiation of the very essence and intention of our Creeds. Such adventures, however you describe them, are not unnatural in an age of eager thought, new discovery, and scientific as well as theological unrest. We can appreciate their generous motive, whatever our view as to the manner or success of its accomplishment. But the utmost carefulness is necessary as to the way in which these expressions are made public.....Personally, I think that we shall increasingly find the gain of resting upon old words rather than on new, realizing always that the old phraseology, with all its steadying force, has, partly from the very fact of its age, been "patient," and is "patient" still, of different interpretation and different application from one generation to another.....
>
> The Creeds, we are assured, are out of date. I have spoken of the absolute need of an alert and open mind for the assimilation of new knowledge upon the things of Christ as the changeful generations pass. But I definitely disbelieve in the redrafting of our ancient Creed, either by central authority or by local enterprise. Were it not that I know the earnestness as well as the learning of those from whom the recommendation comes, I should, when I remember that we have in England some 14,000 parishes, find it difficult to take seriously such words as these: "Modern Churchmen should have the right to modify the use of the Creeds, and to produce, if they will, alternative Creeds for use in parishes where they are desired by the parishioners, provided always that this be done in a wise, loving, and orderly fashion, and with the authority of the Bishop." Poor Bishop! If there be a matter in which it is wise to rest on the old bases, "stare super antiquas vias," it is here. Of course, the actual words, as such, have no imperishable value. They belong to and are limited by the thoughts—theological, metaphysical, scientific—of the age in which they were written; and we have a right, when using them, and when interpreting their phrasal meaning, to give due weight to the growth of human knowledge. But, so far as experience has yet shown us, they will not, when rightly used, fail us in our need.

Not a word, be it noted, did he speak in defence of the truth of those creeds which he desires to retain because of the insuperable difficulty of re-drafting them in a manner which would satisfy the various congregations of 14,000 parishes, though, "of course, the actual words, as

such, have no imperishable value." It is expediency, not truth, which concerns him.

The clergy who afterwards spoke in this same Congress were similarly silent about the truth of the doctrines which had been attacked. They discussed in vague terms whether some undefined differences of opinion should not be permitted within the folds of the Church. Reluctant as one must be to criticize individuals who are moved, as one believes, by motives fundamentally good, can one refrain from stigmatizing such speeches as these as intellectually dishonest? Whatever the motives may be that prompt men to say that expressions of truth should not, without precautions, be made public, such secrecy can serve no good end.

There can be no two or more different interpretations of plain statements of fact, and it is mere delusion—of self and of others—to speak of such various interpretations.

Another prelate has recently published his views upon this question. The Bishop of Ontario, having studied the criticisms made on the Church's creeds at the Cambridge Conference of the Churchmen's Union in 1921, takes pen in hand, not, as might be expected by the faithful, to defend the truth of those creeds which he periodically repeats, but to point out some of the probable consequences of amending them.[1] He claims to speak on behalf of "the plain man," of members of his flock who are not expert theologians—who are, in short, "ignorant no doubt of the theological speculations and conflicts" of which the creeds were the outcome. Of this plain man the Bishop says:—

> Some well-meaning people would like him to be troubled by the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. But he refuses to be troubled. It fits in with his conceptions of Christ as the Son of God, and he considers that the evidence for it is just about as strong as for any other fact concerning Christ. He is well aware that the ascension into heaven and the session at the right hand of God can only be

[1] "Hibbert Journal," April, 1922.

> symbolical representations of the truths they are intended to convey; but he does not see how these truths could be more effectively set forth if they were translated into language believed to be more in accordance with modern ideas.

Doubtless the Bishop's feelings would be extremely hurt if he knew that some of these plain men of whom he speaks call it dishonest to say things which are not true, and would regard themselves as liars if they stood up in church and stated that they believed "he ascended into heaven," when what they actually believe is something indefinable, of which these words are now said to be only a symbolical representation. The Bishop's "plain man" —apparently an uneducated one—may find that the Virgin Birth doctrine fits in with his conceptions of Christ as the Son of God, but he does so because he has formed his conception of Christ as the Son of God from the Virgin Birth story which the Bishop and his colleagues have assured him is true—not because he has studied the evidence and discovered, like the Bishop, that every other dogma concerning Christ is based on evidence equally flimsy. The doctrine must be retained, so the Bishop argues, because, "so far from hindering, it helps his [the plain man's] belief." And so he goes on, without making any claim or pretence that the doctrine is true, to urge its retention because it is the cornerstone of orthodox Christianity.

"Modernist Christology may of course be the true explanation of the facts.....but to the plain wayfaring man it is no sort of substitute for his belief in him 'who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate also for us.' "[1]

[1] Ibid, p. 417. In another article, by M. D. Petre, in this same issue of the "Hibbert," we find the Catholic apology. The Catholic "Modernist" apparently makes endeavours to save the Christ of Catholic worship from the results of a critical examination of the Gospel history by separating the Christ of Catholic worship from the Christ of history. He makes a distinction—as we have already noticed above—between "the spiritual Christ" and "the historical Christ," and declares that he intends

Can a prelate who thus sums up his argument for the retention of the ancient dogmas complain if he is accused of having no regard for the truth? Can he complain of men's indifference to the religion which he teaches when he practically admits that its doctrines are only retained because their retention will enable him and his ecclesiastical fellows to keep their hold on "the plain man"? What scorn would he not pour upon the priest of any other cult who showed such indifference to actual historical facts, such a neglect of logic, and such acquiescence in, and even encouragement of, deception? That he and others fear the results which might follow an acknowledgment of past errors is no excuse for attempting to conceal the errors, or for, still worse, continuing to affirm their belief in them.

The attitude of these leading ecclesiastics reminds one of the words written about eighty years ago with reference to all that mass of myths which mediæval Christians taught and believed—myths so ridiculous that no one now credits them; myths about miracles performed by saints, voyages made by the apostles, and tricks played by the Devil.

"Moreover, far from being combated by the clergy, the popular errors were ardently supported by them; they saw in them a means of re-exciting public devotion, and without doubt also of binding the people to sacerdotal authority by a faith which was all the more ardent the more it was ignorant." [1]

But the clergy should not forget that men and women of the twentieth century are better educated, and therefore less credulous, than men and women of the Middle Ages, and that the policy of pandering to ignorance can only postpone, and not avert, the day when all men will know what they themselves already know.

to worship a Jesus Christ who is "the word of God" to his Church, though not an historical Jesus.

[1] Maury, "Les Légendes Pieuses du Moyen Age," p. 216.

Until archbishops, bishops, and lesser clergy pluck up courage and firmly grasp the nettle which at present they finger so gently, they will suffer, and quite rightly suffer, from their own dishonest timidity. To baser motives will be imputed their equivocal positions. So long as they refuse to discard a doctrine in which only their most ignorant followers believe, so long will they run the risk that men who cannot credit it will also suspect that the moral values which they themselves connect with that doctrine are equally open to doubt. No good cause can find support for ever from a discredited doctrine. Some men for all time, all men for some time, may be induced to accept it; but all men will certainly not accept it for all time.

We have now completed our survey of the Virgin Birth story; but lest, in reading so great an accumulation of evidence, the argument has been lost sight of, a brief summary may not be out of place. That argument was as follows:—

First, that the evidence for this occurrence is very meagre and very contradictory.

Secondly, that for such a story to be credible it would require to be supported by really reliable evidence from witnesses of whom something is known; whereas our witnesses are unknown men, writing at an unknown date, but a date that must have been at least a hundred years after the events they describe.

Thirdly, that a very large number of other stories of virgin and otherwise miraculous births were told and believed at this period in the world's history, though none of them were true.

Fourthly, that men were ready to accept such stories without any adequate inquiry, as in those days men had very curious ideas about what was physically possible in matters of conception.

Fifthly, that many early Christian sects had never

heard, or, if they had heard, did not believe, this story; though some of them told somewhat similar metaphorical stories.

Sixthly, that, if the authors of the chapters in which the story is told wished to invent such a story, they could have found all the details, which form part of it, in other and older stories about gods.

And, lastly, that the doctrine itself, and the rites and ceremonies connected with it in the heyday of Catholicism, before the Protestant split, were pagan in origin.

Those are the points which have to be considered before we can affirm our belief that Jesus was born of a virgin human woman and "conceived by the Holy Ghost" or by God himself. And those are the points which have been considered by all those modern divines who no longer believe, though they dare not publicly disown, the Virgin Birth doctrine.

APPENDICES

Appendix I

CHRISTMAS DAY

It was not until the year 273 A.D., or rather—as the Christian Calendar had not yet been invented—the year 1027 A.U.C., that the 25th of December was adopted by Christians as the day upon which to celebrate the birthday of Jesus.[1] The reason for the selection of that date is not far to seek. The winter solstice has, from the most remote antiquity, been the time devoted to special ceremonies in honour of the God, whoever he was, that men worshipped. Astronomically the Sun begins a new year of life at that annual period, and so, when Sun-gods were worshipped, the 25th of December, or some day approximate to that date, was always selected for the celebration of his birthday. Almost all religions have some root in the primitive worship of the Sun, and the Christians—when they adopted the winter solstice as their Christmas day—merely continued a custom which the adherents of most of the contemporary religions had carried on for many centuries before that time.[2] That day was, of course, the birthday of Apollo, the great Sun-god; and it was also the day upon which were celebrated, by their respective worshippers, the births of Adonis, of Dionysos, and of Mithra. When we celebrate Christmas we continue the practice of hundreds of generations of our remote ancestors, who held festivals at that season every year for many centuries before Christianity had ever been heard of. The ritual remains; the explanation of that ritual changes. That

[1] Hippolytus had some fifty years earlier proposed that date for Christmas, but his proposal was not adopted until 273.

[2] St. Chrysostom (347-406), in his thirty-first homily, states, with reference to the pagan festivals on the 25th of December, that "on this day, also, the birthday of Christ was lately fixed at Rome, in order that, while the heathen were busied with their profane ceremonies, the Christians might perform their holy rites undisturbed"; and he goes on to explain that, after all, it is a very suitable day, as Jesus was the Sun of Righteousness.

explanation we call a myth when referring to a heathen story, the revealed truth when referring to our own!

The 25th of December was so highly regarded as a day suitable for the birthday of a god that it was selected for the apotheosis of Alexander the Great when he was first acclaimed as God in the temple of (Jupiter) Ammon in 322 B.C.

New religions inherit or copy the doctrines and festivals of the old. The Moslem "month of Haj" is celebrated at the time of the year when pre-Moslem pagan festivals had previously been held, and the ancient pagan rites are still carried out during the Haj celebrations.

When Christianity first reached England, Northern Germany, and Scandinavia, its missionaries found pagan rites of many kinds already connected with the day on which they celebrated Christmas. These missionaries and the priests who succeeded them incorporated many of these rites into their Church festival.

The mistletoe of the Druids, the yule logs which had been brought in every year to blaze on the open hearths, the feasting and carousing, have all come down to us from pagan days and from pagan sources. The side boards of the well-to-do are still often graced by the head of a boar, the successor of the beast which slew the man-god Adonis.[1]

Even after the year 273 there was no universal agreement upon the 25th of December as Christmas Day. The pagan element was not yet sufficiently strong in Christianity to enforce a general reception of the ancient birthday festivals.

The Eastern Churches for long continued to observe Christmas Day on the 6th of January, and the Egyptians did the same until the year 431.[2] But even the 6th of January was connected with the general god-birthday. Epiphanius contended that the birthday of Christ must be the 13th day after the 25th of December, these thirteen days corresponding to the twelve apostles and Jesus himself, and bringing Christmas Day to the Epiphany—a day long observed in Egypt as a festival of "The Virgin," Koré Kosmou.[3]

[1] Boar's head is a relic of the sacrifice of a boar to Venus, the lover of Adonis.

[2] See Bingham's "Christian Antiquities."

[3] The Armenian Church, to this day, celebrates Christmas on the 6th of January.

The Basilidians celebrated Christ's birthday on the 24th or 25th of April; other Christian sects celebrated it, so Clement of Alexandria informs us, on the 25th of May.

As many Churches commemorated the birth and the baptism of Christ on the same day, it is probable that such festivals originated before any birth story was known, and when all Christian gospels began, like St. Mark's, with the descent of the Christ spirit into Jesus at his baptism. On that day Jesus would be baptized, and Christ born also.

In all the speculations of these Christians of the first three or four centuries, we notice that it was not facts which dictated the doctrines, but doctrines which dictated the facts. The day to be chosen as the birthday of Christ was the day which fitted best the various theological doctrines already formed, not the day upon which Jesus had actually been born. No one knew what day that was, but nobody very much cared to know, as the important matter in the eyes of everybody was to select an auspicious and a suitable date.

No evidence was quoted, nor any tradition appealed to, to show that the 25th of December was the actual birthday. In fact, there was not, and there never has been, any evidence whatever as to date, except Luke's reference to shepherds watching their flocks by night, if that can be considered as evidence. Certainly, if shepherds watched their flocks by night, it could not have been in mid-winter that the birth took place, as even in Palestine flocks are folded at that time of the year, and not roaming about accompanied by shepherds as they are in the summer.

At the present day no Christian theologian maintains that the day of the year on which Jesus was born is known. Christmas as an anniversary is merely a convention. The only attempt which ever seems to have been made to show that Jesus was actually born upon December 25th, and that therefore the origin of Christmas Day was not pagan, was founded upon the premiss that the Annunciation took place on the 25th of March. From that date—itself selected upon doctrinal and not upon historical grounds—a lapse of nine months brings us to the 25th of December, which would, therefore, if the Annunciation was a physiological process identical in its working with sexual conception, be the correct date for the

birth. As, however, the 25th of March was itself a date inherited from paganism, and not a date supported by evidence of any kind whatsoever, the theory has not gained acceptance even among theologians.

Easter, roughly corresponding with the vernal equinox—the time of the resurrection of vegetable life—was also a time of festival for the followers of many ancient religions; but the period of the year in which Easter is celebrated does correspond with the Biblical story, as the crucifixion is said to have taken place at the time of the passover—the two events being theologically parallel.

Yet Christians spilt torrents of each other's blood in quarrels about the fixing of the date of Easter, and accepted Christmas Day without much demur. So much the more easy did they find it to agree about the altogether unknown than about the partly, or supposedly, known.

The harmless festivities of Christmastide, and the spirit of peace and goodwill with which they are traditionally associated, are customs and feelings which it would be sad to see forgotten or eradicated; but for theological purposes Christmas stands on a par with the Mohurrum of the Moslems and the Krishna festivals of the Hindus. It could remain an occasion for jollity, merriment, and goodwill, consecrated by its antiquity and tender associations, even though its pretensions to be the anniversary of any historical event of more importance than its own annual occurrence be denied, or, with the indulgent smile of a peaceable philosopher, classed among the fairy tales. Peace and goodwill reign more easily when the followers of all the religions join together and celebrate the return of the sun and the beginning of a new year than when theologians assemble to decry the idolatry of others and to wrangle about which of the gods were really born on the 25th of December.

Appendix II

"SON OF GOD"

As we have contended before, it is necessary, if we are fully to understand the meaning of the words employed by the men from whom we inherit our religion, to study, and if possible appreciate, the psychological climate in which these men dwelt.

What did such men really mean when they used the expression, "Son of God"? This, if we can answer it, is a question of the highest import to us in our study of Christian origins. We shall be under the gravest of illusions if we accept the phrase as being always used in its plain physical sense, because, as we shall see immediately we make any inquiry into the matter, the theologians of two thousand years ago did not always, did not indeed generally, use it with that meaning.

By the Jews the title "Son of God" was not used in a literal sense, but in the same way as the expression "Your heavenly Father" is applied in the Gospels to all men. It was a metaphysical title often applied to saintly and holy men. In the Jewish "Wisdom" literature every pious man is spoken of as a "Son of God," and every pious Jew did regard his God, Yahwe (Jehovah), as his Father. Such words were always used metaphorically; such ideas were spiritual, and had no connection with material begetting and being begotten. When the writer of Psalm ii wrote, "The Lord hath said unto me: 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,'" he meant it in a spiritual sense. It remained for the originators of the Virgin Birth story to use these words in their literal meaning of a physical relationship.

In the Old Testament the Israelites are often referred to as "Sons of God," or as "begotten by God." Israel himself is said to be the first-born Son of God.[1] Deuteronomy xiv, 1, which in our Authorized Version runs "Ye are the children of

[1] Exodus iv, 22.

the Lord your God," reads in the Septuagint version "Ye are the sons of the Lord your God"; and the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy xxxii, 18, has the words, "God who begat thee," in the place of the words, "God that formed thee," of the Authorized Version; and even the latter, which does not always stick so closely to the original Hebrew, has "The Rock that begat thee" at the beginning of the same verse, and "is not he [the Lord] thy father" in verse six of the same chapter.

In the Prophets the term is frequently used in the same figurative sense.[1]

In the book of Job[2] we have an example of its use to denote the servants of God: "Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them."[3]

Ezra, the leader of the Jews who returned from the exile in Babylon, and the first compiler of the earliest Old Testament books, received from the Jews the title of "Son of God."

Philo the Jew[4] wrote: "And if a man should not as yet have the good fortune to be worthy to be called Son of God, let him strive manfully to set himself in order....." Men, he said, who had not yet become fit to be judged Sons of God, might at any rate be "Sons of His Eternal Likeness" (the Logos).

In the Epistles we find that the same idea recurs. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."[5] "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."[6] Therefore, before any Virgin Birth story had been formulated, or, at any rate, apart from any such story, Jesus might be called the Son of God—the spiritual representative of the Deity, "god-child" of the Supreme, and metaphorically heir of the All-Good.

[1] E.g., "Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hosea i, 10).
[2] Job i, 6.
[3] See "Paradise Regained," bk. iv, 500–520, where Milton describes Satan as claiming for himself the title of "Son of God," and as desirous of learning, regarding Jesus—

"In what degree or meaning thou art called
The 'Son of God,' which bears no single sense."

[4] Who lived from 30 B.C. to 45 A.D.
[5] Romans viii, 14. [6] 1 John iii, 1.

The ancient Oriental theosophists—pre-Christian Hindus —though they varied the terminology, taught the same idea. All men are sons of God, as every individual has in him part of the Universal Soul which is God. There is only one Reality: that is God; that is Life; that is the Universal Mind. And each individual shares in this One Life, in this One Universal Mind, in this One God. That is the old Eastern philosophy, which gives rise to such figurative expressions as "Son of God." That is the conception which was afterwards to be combined by ignorant Westerners with cruder pagan ideas of physically begotten sons of gods.

Further East such terms were used as titles of respect. The Oriental love of hyperbole encourages such grandiose expressions. The "Son of Heaven" was, and perhaps even in these republican days still is, a title of the Emperor of China. Oriental servants still give the title "Father" to their masters. "Master is my Father and my Mother" must have been said many times to every British official who has lived long in India.

Many Old and New Testament phrases should be read as Oriental metaphors, and not as Occidental expressions of scientific fact. We are not, however, the only people who have inherited metaphors materialized. The Peruvians believed that their great god, the Sun, sent down not only a son, but also a daughter, to live on earth with mortal men, and that these two—not only brother and sister, but husband and wife too—were the ancestors of their kings, the Incas. The youthful Incas were always known as "Children of the Sun." Most likely in this case, as in others, the title was given to the Incas long before the story was invented. That would be invented to explain the title, as myths are often invented to explain a ritual.

There is only one passage in the Old Testament in which the expression "Son of God" appears to be intended literally. In Daniel (iii, 25) we are told that one whose form was like the "Son of God" walked with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Now, Daniel, though admittedly a very late book compared with the time when the events related in it are said to have taken place, is at any rate pre-Christian, and the Son of God therein referred to could not have been

the Jesus of whom the Gospels tell. Neither is it contended by any one that he was another incarnation of Christ. In the Septuagint version of Daniel, which is older and fuller than our abridged and otherwise edited version, the words, "a son of the gods," are used instead of "Son of God"; so it appears that the author of this book believed that Divine personages descended to earth sufficiently often to be recognized as such. Daniel is, however, a peculiar book in many respects, and this exception does not invalidate the argument that the expression "Son of God" was generally used in a metaphorical and not in a literal sense. It must be left to professional theologians to explain who was the companion of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and what happened to him when these three came forth from the sevenfold super-heated fiery furnace; as this the "prophet" himself has omitted to do.

Appendix III

THE LATEST APOLOGIA

It is interesting to compare Milman's treatment of the Virgin Birth story with that of one of the few modern theologians who believe in it. Dr. Gore ("Belief in God," pp. 274–282, published in 1921) admits that the Virgin Birth has been the subject of "a flood of controversy." The Bishop, like the Dean, avoids any detailed discussion of the contradictions in the two stories; but the Bishop, unlike the Dean, finds himself compelled to make a semblance of dealing with the principal ones. So very briefly he proceeds to do so.

The reasons for the generally accepted theory, that the early chapters of Luke were written by another author than he who wrote the rest of the Gospel, he deals with thus:—

> It is obvious that when you pass from Luke's preface to his narrative you pass from very good literary Greek to a Greek which is Greek only in the words used. The spirit and method is quite Aramaic. St. Luke, then, is quoting an Aramaic document or story.

So, the Bishop concludes, the story must have been a very old one. But why should Luke quote this particular story from an Aramaic source, and not from the same sources whence he obtained the rest of his Gospel, unless it was unknown to those from whom he learnt the rest of it? And why should he forget his Greek because he is translating from an Aramaic story? And why should the remainder of his Gospel exhibit signs of being written by one who had never heard the story told in its first and second chapters?[1]

It is generally admitted—in fact, it cannot be denied—that

[1] Modern scholars do not agree with the Bishop's theory that this particular Greek is especially Aramaic in spirit. They regard it as vernacular Greek of much the same kind as that used in the Septuagint. However, the actual source is of little importance compared with the fact that the source differs from that of the remainder of the Gospel.

the Matthew and Luke stories are contradictory. The Bishop prefers the expression "utterly independent," and states that "this independence of course emphasizes their point of agreement—viz., that Jesus was born at Bethlehem of a virgin mother."

So the very disagreements are said to be a valuable sign of the truth of both stories. If one witness testified that he had seen a murder committed in Piccadilly at midday on January 1, and another that he had seen the same man murdered at Battersea at midnight in June, would the Bishop, on the evidence of those witnesses alone, find an accused person guilty? Would he say that their utter independence emphasized their point of agreement?

As regards the pedigrees of Joseph, the Bishop writes:—

> That two discrepant genealogies should have been admitted into the Gospels (which was felt as a grave difficulty from the earliest times) is an amazingly clear sign that the Church was not at all given to manipulate documents in order to produce harmony.

So, "without seeking explanations of the discrepancy" (and, incidentally, without discussing, or even mentioning, the incongruity of any genealogy of Joseph and a Virgin Birth story), he thinks "we may be quite content.....to recognize that the Jewish families of pure descent were given to constructing genealogies." In other words, the discrepancies being inexplicable and the genealogies themselves irreconcilable with the story which the Bishop would have us believe, he bids us think no more about the evidence and the witnesses, but believe the doctrine in spite of their unreliability and their detected misstatements. For contradictions are only worthy of notice as evidence of the Church's neglect to edit its documents!

The Dean, in his generation, had the easier task. He did not find it necessary to attempt an apologia.

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